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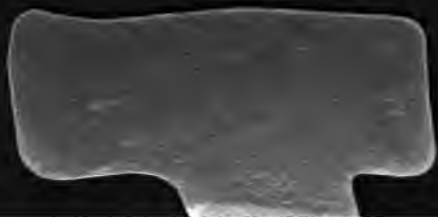
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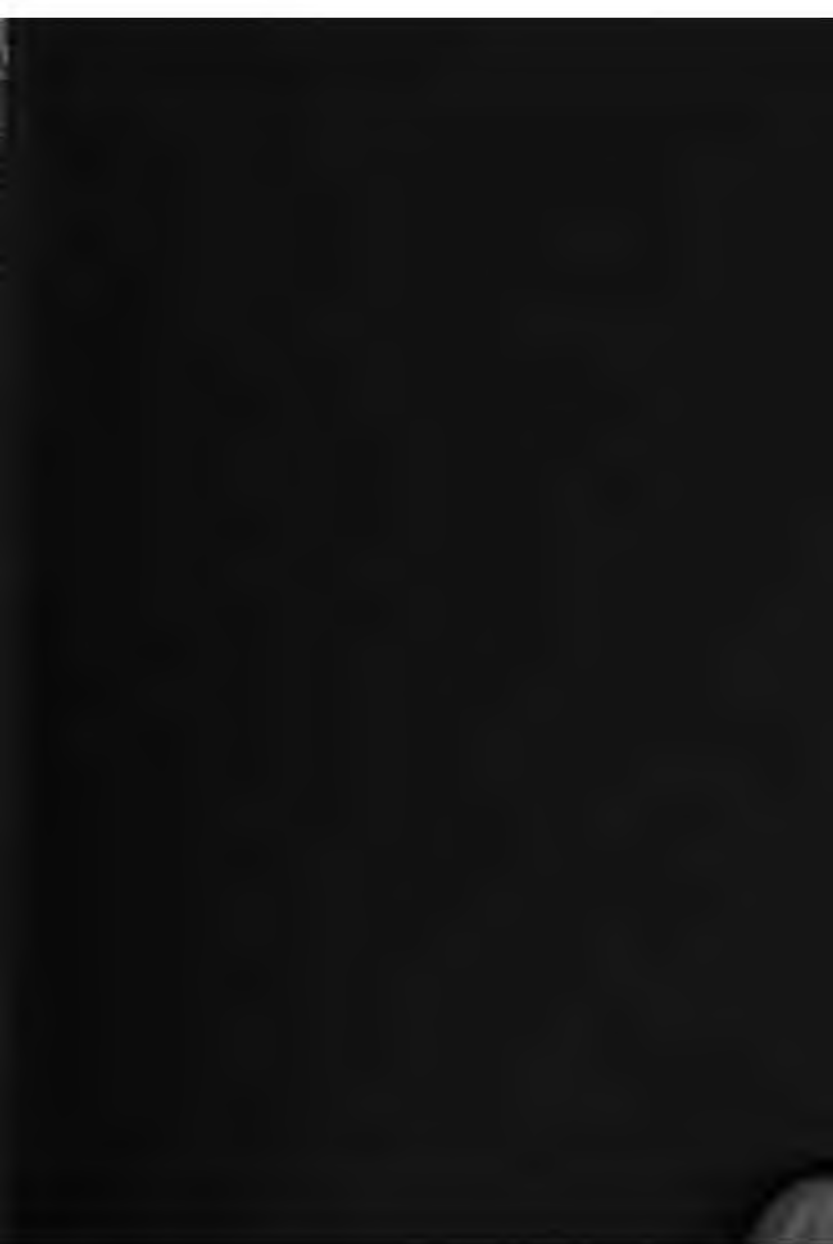






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THE PRINCESS OF SILVERLAND
AND OTHER TALES.





THE
PRINCESS OF SILVERLAND,
AND OTHER TALES.

BY
ELSIE STRIVELYNE.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY SIR NOEL PATON.



London :
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1874.

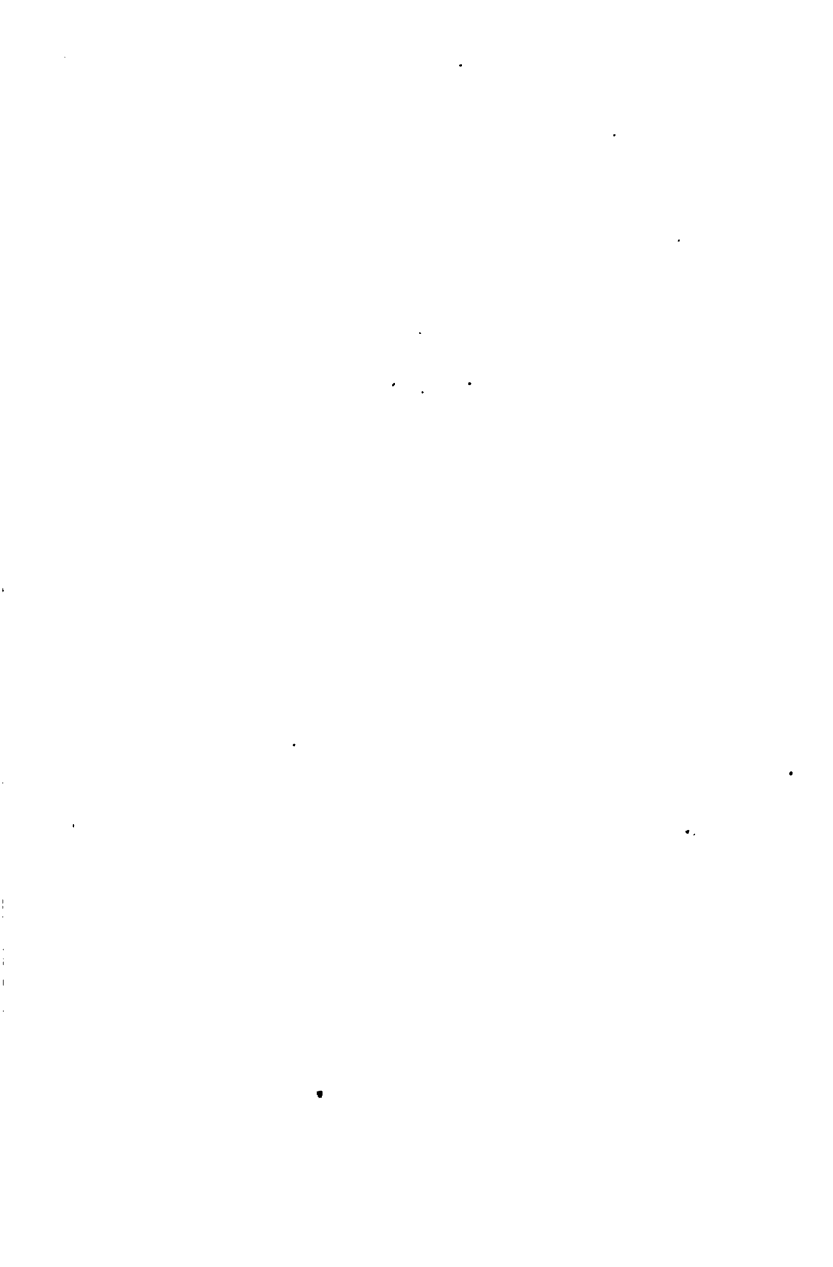
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THE PRINCESS OF SILVERLAND.

CHAPTER I.

ONCE upon a time a good King and a good Queen reigned over a beautiful country, called Silverland, far away under the moonrise. It was called Silverland because there were so many silvery things about it; there were feathery trees with sweeping branches, and silvery trunks streaked with gold and brown; then there were tall trees with reddish trunks, on which grew silver mosses: some of them grew in little clumps, some in scales, like trays, on which stood silver cups for the fairies to drink out of, and some were long tresses that blew backwards and forwards in the wind. People said this was the hair of earth fairies, who had been sent to plant trees and make the fields fresh and ready for corn, and who, when their task was done, and they had to pass on to other countries, left long locks behind, to show how sorry

they were to go, but of this we are not sure. On the slopes of the woods grew thousands of wild flowers of a kind for which the land was celebrated ; the plant was tall, and from among its dark green leaves rose one stalk bearing a pure white cup, in which stood a drop of clear dew ; when the sun went down the cups closed up their petals, and then one saw that the under side was streaked with the palest pink and lilac. Whenever the breezes blew, all these beautiful flowers bent down before it, and then rose up again into their places with a delicate toss of their silvery heads ; and, as they swung one day, some wise men who could hear fairy music, that other people did not understand, heard them singing a song, and they put down the words, and this was the song of the windflowers, for so the people of Silverland called them.

SONG OF THE WINDFLOWERS.

Silver-sounding breezes sigh—
Sing and sigh again !
From the silvery western sky,
Where the white cloud spirits lie,
Waft the silver rain.

Waft us on your silver wings
Every still delight
That the silver day-dawn brings,
Or the silver moon down flings
Through the summer night.

Silver songs of bird and bee,
Of leaf, and lake, and stream,
Round us let them flit and flee,
While we answer silverly
In our noontide dream.

Silver pure by mount and mere,
We bloom, a fairy band,
With tender voices, silver clear,
Singing ever, far and near,
Unto whosoe'er can hear,
Sweet songs of Silverland !

Besides all these things, there were silver-sounding streams, that leapt and tumbled into wide lakes, whose clear waters rippled and lapped on silvery beaches, so that you see the country deserved its name of Silverland.

You would think the King and Queen who had such a fine kingdom must have been very happy, and so they would have been, but for one thing that vexed them ; and that was, the conduct of an old

witch, named Nevercontent, who had lived for more years than anyone could count, at the foot of a hill near the palace. Nothing ever pleased her, and by a way she had of telling people that the good things they possessed were not good at all, and that they really ought to get something quite different, she made an immense deal of mischief in the country. She had even gone so far as to make the good King's subjects discontented with him, and they had formed themselves into companies, who took names from the ideas they particularly approved of, and used to come to the palace and give a great deal of trouble. Thus, some were called Rumpusmen, who said that the men who made most noise in the council should get what they wanted, and some were Wordmen, who said that whoever could talk longest, and use the biggest words, should be attended to; but the worst of all were the Muddlemen, who did not know quite what they wanted, but were only sure that nothing that anybody else did was right. The poor King used to do his best to please them, and when he had quieted them for a little, he would go to the Queen and say, "My dear, I have had hard work! The Muddlemen

did not like the way corks are drawn at present, and wanted a cork-drawing machine, but the Wordmen would not have it, and called it a procedure that was apodictically useless, and against which they would make a nuncupatory oblatration. While I was looking in the dictionary, to see what they meant, the Rumpusmen took the back gate off its hinges, because their liberty was threatened in the matter of drawing corks."

"And what did you do?" said the Queen.

"Well, I found a word the Wordmen didn't know, so I silenced them, for I told them, if the assecution of corks made them polypragmatical, they had better study Xerophaghy; and I only gave the Muddlemen five new corkscrews, each two turns longer than the old ones; and now I am very tired, so let us go to Windybrae."

And the Queen said, "Certainly, my love, these people are very stupid, because everybody might draw corks according to their own taste; but you have acted wisely, and I will pack up a good lunch, and change my dress, and we will go to Windybrae."

Windybrae, you must know, was a nice little

summer-house where the King and Queen used to go by themselves for a holiday, and leave their crowns and councillors behind them ; and somehow it happened that all the King's wisest laws and all the Queen's prettiest dresses were made up at Windybrae. The house had got that name because there the slopes were broader and the windflowers more lovely than anywhere else in the whole kingdom.

After lunch, when the Queen had put the table tidy, she went and sat under a great lime tree with the King, and began to talk. While they were at luncheon they had only chatted about nice, funny things, but now they began to discuss business, for they were much grieved at the continual disturbances in Silverland.

"My dear," said the King, "something really must be done; for these subjects of mine spend so much time in quarrelling and abusing me and each other, that they have not got through nearly so much good work this year as they did last, and they are beginning to care more about noise than about doing their duty."

"You know what I think about it," was all the Queen answered.

“Ah,” sighed the King; “but I am afraid.”

“Afraid is a foolish word when right has to be done,” replied the Queen, boldly; “and I say you will never have quiet in the kingdom till you get rid of that old witch Nevercontent. Now, I would have her taken by a strong guard and shut up in the Bluerock Castle that is just at the boundary of your dominions.”

“Would you, indeed, my dear?” said a croaking voice behind, which made both the King and Queen jump up and then sit down again, and look at each other with very frightened faces.

“Would you, indeed, my dear?” repeated Nevercontent; for she it was peering out from a bush where she had been listening. Then the Queen plucked up courage and answered, though the King tried by signs to keep her silent.

“Yes, Madam Nevercontent, I would; for you know, as well as I do, that you are at the bottom of all the mischief that goes on, and I think it is our duty to make our subjects as good as we can.”

“Very well spoken, very well, indeed; but you see you have not been quite as wise as usual to-day, so

you may learn a few things from me for once: first, when you think ill of people, you should keep your thoughts to yourself; it isn't nice to hear such remarks as you've been making."

"No, Madam Nevercontent," said the Queen, colouring up; "but you should know that listeners never hear good of themselves."

"*Very* well again, my dear," croaked the witch, with an ugly smile.

"Oh, Queen, Queen!" said the poor King, "pray do not speak so. I assure you, good Madam Nevercontent, she is a little quick-tempered; but she doesn't mean it."

"*You* don't mean that," retorted the witch, "and I think the less of you for trying to humbug me; but now listen, both of you, to what I've got to say. You can't suppose I am not going to punish you for making yourselves so disagreeable to me as you always do; but I will not be so hard on you as you deserve. I know you want a little Princess up at the palace; well,—you shall have one."

Then the King and Queen looked at her with sparkling eyes, and began to think she was going to

be good to them after all; but while they were thanking her they saw her face grow uglier and uglier, and she began to speak again.

“Stop a bit; I’ve something else to say: you shall have the Princess; but you shall be never-contented. Why, I shall not tell you now; but you will find it out by-and-by.”

After this the King and Queen went home very sadly, and could only do their best to make things go smoothly until the arrival of the baby Princess, in the hope that the old witch would not fulfil her cruel threat.

In due time the little Princess made her appearance, and the whole court was assembled to do honour to her at her christening. Everybody was delighted with her; for she had clear grey eyes, and her hair was very soft and golden, and her mouth very tiny and red, so that she was pronounced to be the prettiest baby that ever was seen. All the good people of the country brought presents for her, which were laid out on a table to be looked at. The finest presents were given by ladies, because they were for a Princess, not a Prince. Each lady came dressed in

her very best, and walked up to the table, curtsying to the King and Queen, who sat one on each side of it: then she laid her gift on a white and gold cushion, held by a little page, whose dress was white, trimmed with butter-cups of real gold, and he showed it to the King and Queen, while the lady told them what the use of it was. When they had seen it, the page put it on the table, and the court scribe wrote in a silver book who gave it and what was said about it. Last of all, when the whole court had seen it, it was carried away to the Princess's store-room by her own pages; and they were dressed in blue dresses, with daisy trimmings made of silver.

Of course it took a long time to collect all these presents and write down their uses, so I can only tell you about the nicest ones. First, a lady brought a knife and fork, and they looked rather common, for they were only made of steel, with mother-of-pearl handles; but she said—

“Please your Majesties, if our dear little Princess will always use these she can never eat anything that is bad for her, for the blade of the knife, if it cuts anything unwholesome, turns black, and the fork

will not pick it up. They were made by Roni the Magician, who makes the best steel in the world."

"And this cup, please your Majesties," said another lady, "was made of congealed moonbeams by my fairy grandmother—that is why it is such a wonderful colour; and as long as the Princess uses this she can never be poisoned, for if any poisonous drink is put into it the part touched by the liquid will turn dark grey, as if a cloud were passing over the moon."

"With this arrow," said a third, "the Princess can never lose her way. It was dug up on Midsummer's eve, exactly under the centre of a rainbow; and when it is laid on the ground by its possessor it will always point out the right road to any place she wishes to reach."

"And with this glass," said a fourth, "she need never be deceived by her enemies, for if she sits down in front of it, and makes people stand behind her, she will be able to tell their true characters at once. If they are good their faces will look quite natural in the glass; if they are ill-natured she will see them as they really are, with distorted faces and dull eyes;

and if they are deceitful, the crystal, which came from the Ice King's palace, will not reflect them at all."

These were the best of the presents, the rest being quite poor by comparison—strings of emeralds and rubies, wrought-gold ornaments, and so on; and after an immense number of these had been laid on the table, the Queen turned to the King and said—

"I think we may be well content with the gifts that have been given to-day."

She had hardly uttered the words when a hideous sound was heard, which made all the guests look anxiously round, for everyone in the country knew the conch or trumpet-shell that was blown to make them clear the way for the carriage of Witch Never-content. Presently the trumpeter appeared, pushing his way rudely through the crowd, and he was nearly as ugly as his mistress, and wore glaring colours—scarlet, and orange stripes. Immediately behind him hobbled the witch, leaning on her stick, and smiling and nodding maliciously to her acquaintances. When she came near the throne the King and Queen rose and received her respectfully, for they were alarmed,

and wished to put her in as good a humour as possible.

“Good morning,” she began, in a rude, disagreeable voice, that was like the croaking of one dozen frogs and six jackdaws; “very pretty doings these. I daresay you think yourselves well off, but you don’t know what you are talking about; and the day will come that you will wish these presents and that pale-faced baby, (she’s just like bread-pudding,) at the bottom of the sea. Now, you needn’t get red faces and look angry; you know what nice things we said to each other at Windybrae, and I am come to explain myself. Tell me first what name you have given to that creature.”

“Preciosa, madam!”

“Very well, that will be her name in all the books she gets; but I’ll tell you what the people will call her—Frostybelle.”

“Frostybelle! what an extraordinary name!” exclaimed the guests.

“Yes, that’s what she will be called, and I will tell you why. She will grow tall and beautiful and clever, but she will have no feeling. She won’t care

about you, for instance, Queen, and she will have such an ice-cold heart that Frostybelle will not be a chilly enough name for her. To prove the truth of what I say, everything she wears, however bright the colour, will turn white as snow as long as it touches her, and so it must be until some one finds out how to make her feel like other people. Do you think now you will be contented?"

As the witch said this the poor Queen got up, crying out that it could not be true, it was so dreadful, and that she must try and see whether it was not all nonsense; so she caught up a string of rubies and laid it on the baby's throat, and just as Nevercontent had predicted, the colour faded, faded, faded, till the stones were as pure as crystal, though when they were lifted up they shone as clear crimson as before. Then the Queen burst into tears, and flinging herself at the witch's feet, prayed her to punish her or the kingdom, not the poor little Princess, who had done nothing wrong; but the King raised her up and said—

"You forget yourself, Queen; the kingdom must not suffer for our sakes, and we will not disgrace

ourselves under this sorrow, but bear it well, and perhaps some day some one may be found to help us."

Then all the people cheered and clapped their hands at the King's brave words, and several courtiers stepped forward and promised to try and discover a cure for the Princess; but the witch held up her hand and cried—

"Stay and hear me before you promise, good people. I don't say none can undo what I have done. Perhaps some man will be wise enough to accomplish it, and then he may marry the Princess; but I tell you this, whoever tries and does not succeed will never be contented again as long as he lives."

At this the courtiers fell back, and as they shrunk away, the witch hobbled off with her trumpeter, laughing to herself as she thought that she had made so many people unhappy, though she knew, what they did not know, that her power some day must come to an end.

CHAPTER II.

TIME passed on, and the greatest care was taken of Preciosa, who grew so fast and well, that the witch's prophecy that she would be beautiful, seemed sure of fulfilment. She was a very merry baby, and often at first, when her parents were playing with her, they would forget that she was not like other children; but the older she grew, the more the Queen, in particular, felt the difference. The merry laugh was so clear and hard, that it made one feel cold to listen to it; and Frostybelle, for so everyone called her, did not care the least bit for anybody, so that the Queen, when she saw poor women in the fields hugging their babies, used to be ready to cry, for she remembered that her little Princess would not come to her to be kissed and cuddled, and would not lay her little soft cheek against her's, as nice warm cosy babies like to do. None of the courtiers who had

been so eager to cure her had ever offered to try since they had heard the witch's threat; for even, if they had been willing to run the risk of failure themselves, their families would not hear of it, and the Queen said she did not wonder at that, for she knew how terrible it was never to feel contented or happy. Still, when Frostybelle was five years old, she determined to proclaim publicly that the reward would be given as Nevercontent had said; and as, of course, whoever married the Princess would reign over Silverland, she hoped so great a prize might induce some clever man to make the attempt.

Directly the announcement was made, several people appeared who called themselves doctors, and gave the poor Princess all sorts of nasty things to take, that did her no good, for that was not the way to set about so difficult a task. After she had swallowed Potential Pills of the Pharisees, and Distilled Essence of Diatribe, and been rolled up in Buncombe's Bandages, and otherwise tormented after the manner of quacks, the King got angry, and turned the pretenders out of the palace in such a hurry that they left all their remedies behind them, and lost

the recipes, which was all the better for the world at large. Forthwith they betook themselves into the cities, and the sad effects of the witch's punishment began to be seen, for not only were they discontented themselves, but they went about spreading discontent like a plague among the people, till there was almost a rebellion in the country, and a monster meeting assembled at the gates of the palace, declaring that nobody should be allowed to try and cure the Princess, for that she couldn't be cured, and they wouldn't and shouldn't have a lot of ill-natured, dissatisfied persons turned loose among them—wherein they were right for once.

The King, when he had heard them, came in and told the Queen, "and indeed, my dear," he added, "I don't see how we can refuse such a reasonable request."

"Reasonable!" exclaimed the Queen, "there are some things better than reason!" and with that she caught up the baby and went out to the palace gates. What she said I need not tell you exactly, but when the people saw her standing there with tears streaming down her face, asking for help for her child, they

got quite quiet, and one of their leaders came forward, and taking his hat off respectfully, said, "Please your Majesty, will you consider if nothing can be done to save us from the bad example of the unsuccessful, for we all think no one will ever succeed."

Now the man, while he spoke, was looking at Preciosa's face, and, as he said this, he started, and seemed so surprised, that the Queen looked down at her too. The string of rubies had never been taken off her throat, and the Queen's tears had been falling on them and on her cheek, and as she felt them fall she gave a little shiver, and looked up at her mother with a strange look in her eyes, while a slight, a very slight flush, passed through the white rubies. It was gone again directly, but it had given the poor Queen fresh heart, and she spoke out so clearly, that everyone in the crowd could hear her.

"My people, you are wrong, for I know now that Princess Preciosa can be cured, but I will do this for you: whoever tries and fails shall be carried away to Bluerock, and shall trouble you no more."

The crowd dispersed when they heard this, and the Queen went in, looking so proud and bright that

her courtiers were astonished till they heard what she had seen, and then, like everyone else, they began to think that even the prospect of imprisonment at Bluerock would not prevent fresh attempts being made to cure the Princess.

Two or three doctors did make their appearance at intervals, but when they had spoken to Frostybelle, and seen how cold she was, they were frightened, and went away again; and many were dismissed without seeing her at all, for it was clear they had no medicines except such as were mentioned in the Quack's Recipe Book, and the King had everybody who applied examined, so that no more rubbish should be brought into the court nursery. Frostybelle, therefore, was eleven years old before anything was done in earnest, and by that time she was nearly perfect in everything except her heart.

She was tall, and her fair hair had grown so long and wavy that when she ran it looked like a circle of light round her head. She was very clever, and could talk and read as well as the wisest men in her father's court, but she was as cold as a beautiful marble statue. Her eyes always looked exactly the

same, her cheeks were quite pale, and as her dresses were always white, as Nevercontent had said, there was nothing bright about her but her golden hair. On her eleventh birthday a wise man came to the palace and craved an audience, and when he was ushered in he made a very long speech. He said he had been thinking for many years of how to cure the Princess, and at last had solved the problem, for by using some charms he knew, and dressing her in a robe made of certain combinations of colours, he could overcome the outward tendency to abstraction of tint, and thereby effect a cure. He gave such scientific reasons that the King was convinced he must be right, but the Queen shook her head and said, "Let him try if he likes, but he will go to Bluerock."

The wise man smiled when he heard this, and remarking to the King that her Majesty had doubtless not studied the sciences, he went on to explain that the colours he required could only be obtained by making a robe of the feathers of a certain wonderful bird, from a country very far away, and so difficult to get at, that it would take him three

years to procure a sufficient number. In case you have not heard of this bird before I will try and describe it. Its neck and breast are gold, and green, and flame colour, and brown, all melting into each other, so that you never can tell what colour you are really looking at; on its back is a patch of soft grey and white, its wings are purple and blue, and its tail is of all these colours one below the other, ending in long feathers of shades of brown like beech leaves in autumn; on its head is a beautiful crest of green and black, and when it flies in the sun it looks like a bit of the rainbow floating in the air. Now if anybody says this bird only lives in Fairyland, you may tell them that if they will go far enough through the British Empire they may find it.

True to his promise, on Frostybelle's fourteenth birthday, just three years after he set out from her father's court, Mistiepate (for that was the wise man's name) returned with the feather robe completed; but he had grown grey and thin in his long travels, and seemed quite worn out with fatigue, so that the Queen felt sorry for him, and determined to try and preserve him from the prison at Bluerock.

Calling him to her, therefore, she asked him how he had made so sure that this robe was to give the Princess a heart.

"Your Majesty," he replied, "it would be impossible for me to explain, but out of learned books and profound meditations have I arrived at this absolute conclusion."

"Ah! have you any children of your own?"

"No, your Majesty."

"Then listen to me, and prove yourself wiser than you have ever been yet. Go and watch all the children who come and play with the Princess, talk to them awhile, and then look at her, and see if you had not better carry your lovely robe home again. Remember, if you fail, I cannot save you from Bluerock."

Mistiepate evidently thought the Queen a very silly woman; but he only said, in a positive manner—

"Your Majesty, science cannot err; I pray you to summon your courtiers to behold my success."

After this nothing more could be done, and so the silver room was opened, and the thrones placed as they had been on the day of the christening,

and the courtiers crowded in eagerly to see, some of them really anxious that the poor Princess should get a heart, some of them declaring that she had far better be without one than have to marry such a miserable old man as the magician.

Preciosa herself did not care, of course, what was done to her; and she waited patiently between her father and mother for Mistiegate to put the robe on her. He, however, after unfolding it, and carefully smoothing every feather, begged permission to tell the audience something of the toils he had undergone in procuring it. The King thought he might have put off talking till after the trial of the robe; but being courteous, as a king should be, he allowed him to say all he could, and a very great deal that was. When he had quite ended, having shown to his own satisfaction how hard he had worked, he turned round and flung the robe over the shoulders of the Princess. What was his consternation when the very instant it touched her, all the fine colours vanished, and there was her pale face, unchanged, above a downy white dress that looked as if it were made of freshly-fallen snow-flakes. Poor Mistiegate

grew as pale as she, as he gazed at her and muttered, "Science—cannot—err!" Indeed, so horrified was he that he hardly heard the murmurs from the crowd outside growing into a shout of—"To prison with him!" "To Bluerock with him!" and scarcely seemed to understand when the Queen said, sadly, "I warned you in vain. Go; and learn in your solitude that science cannot make a heart."

With that the guard came in, and marched him off to Bluerock; but as he went he heard Frostybelle's sharp voice saying, "Mamma, what is the use of all this fuss? I'd much rather be as I am than vex myself as papa is doing now."

"Hush, hush, my child," said the Queen; "to hear you say that is the worst thing of all."

After this the Queen thought she would try a plan of her own with her daughter; so she got a little curly-haired, black-nosed dog, named Fluff, so wise that he appeared to know all that was said to him, and became Frostybelle's favourite companion. When she saw that the Princess never stirred out without him, and that she fed him with her own hands, and, in fact, behaved as if she were fond of

him, the Queen ordered a page to take him away and hide him far from the palace.

As soon as her lessons were over, Frostybelle came running down stairs, calling, as usual, "Fluff! Fluff!" But no Fluff appeared, and the Queen watched her carefully, to see what she would do next. She called for her pages and maids, and ordered a search to be begun, in which she helped; then she scolded everybody because the loss of her dog put her out; then a page secretly sent by the Queen came up and said—

"Please, your royal highness, perhaps Fluff is dead."

"Dead! Oh, dear, how tiresome; what shall I do?" said Frostybelle, with a great yawn. "See now, page, you must find me another dog; there must be lots like Fluff in Silverland, and for to-day I'll feed my pony instead."

The poor Queen sighed, and sent for Fluff, for she saw that his loss made Frostybelle only a little cross, and not in the least sorry, and that though her scheme was a wiser one than Mistiepate's it had no better success in the end.

Now, Mistiepate had two younger brothers named

Flittertit and Bongleboe, who were both clever enough magicians in their way, though there was one great difference between them. Flittertit did everything he had to do in a hurry, and was always trying to decide what people would be about a hundred years or so after his time, which he called taking an intelligent interest in the development of futurity. Bongleboe, on the other hand, was very serious and slow, and knew a good deal of what had been done a few hundred years back, which he declared was a proper consideration of the portentous past. This being the case, they did not get on very well together; but they were both so angry at the imprisonment of Mistiepate that they agreed to stop quarrelling about what had been done or should be done, and concoct some plan by which they should revenge their brother.

After much talking they agreed what they were to do, and set out for the court of Silverland, where they were politely received.

Then they informed the King that the feather robe their brother had made could not possibly be of any use, unless before putting it on the Princess

should eat some bits of a certain pale green plant that grew under the snow in the far country where Mistiegate had gone to procure the birds. Unfortunately, this plant, they said, could not be transplanted, for directly it was taken from the snow it died, so that Frostybelle herself must go to get it.

"Where does it grow?" asked the King.

"On the top of the hills quite beyond the Land of Sand," answered Flittertit, quickly; but as soon as he had spoken he saw that he had gone too far.

"You must be traitors," cried the King, angrily, "if you dare propose that the Princess should go there; you know——"

"Hem!" said Bonglebores, suddenly, so loud that everyone looked at him. "Hem! King Rumpel went there, and King Rumpel came back again!"

Now there was nothing clever in announcing this, for everybody in the court had read the court history, so they knew it already; but Bonglebores said it so imposingly, in a great fat voice that came slowly out of a great fat throat, that they all said, "Really, ah, indeed!" as if they had never heard of King Rumpel in their lives. Seeing this Flittertit discreetly held

his tongue, and let his brother go on to explain that though no doubt the wonderful plant was found in largest quantities on the hills that were right on the other side of the Barren Land, it could also be obtained on the hill-tops between Rubyland and Silverland—hills so wild that no one knew or cared anything about them. “And I need not tell your enlightened majesty and your accomplished courtiers that the honourable Princess need only cross a mere corner of the Land of Sand, to get to the place I have described.”

The King and his courtiers felt somehow comfortable and well pleased with themselves when the crafty fat man had done speaking, and, after a little consultation, the King said—

“Our daughter shall go, but she must have fitting escort ; all the greatest and best men of our court.”

“Excuse me, your majesty, they can only accompany her part of the way, as it is necessary to the charm that she should travel the latter portion of the journey with only my brother and me.”

At this there was a great hubbub, and all the Wordmen, and Rumpusmen, and Muddlemen, began

to discuss the expedition, some saying Frostybelles ought not to go, some that they were bound to give the magicians a chance, some that whether she went or not there would be a muddle, and so on, till the young lady herself walked in and told them, it did not matter to her what they all thought, for that she meant to go, and she was sure her father would not stop her.

After some time had been spent in preparations, everything was declared ready, and the Queen called Frostybelles into her own room to bid her good-bye. "My dear," said she, "are you sure you know where your knife and fork and cups are, and the arrow and looking-glass? for you will want them all."

"Yes, mamma, they are all in one little box, and I have hung the key round my neck."

"Very well, now I have one more gift to add, and it will help to make the others useful; look, what do you see in this box?"

"Why nothing, mamma!" said the Princess, looking very much puzzled. Her mother laughed and rubbed a little ointment on her eyes, "What do you see now?" asked she.

"A little grey net, as fine as a cobweb, lying at the bottom of the box."

"That net is the most precious thing I have, Frostybelle," said the Queen, "it was spun by the Fairy Everbright from the gossamers that the dew hangs on in the morning, and it makes anything that is put into it invisible ; take it out and lay it on your box, and even the two magicians will not be able to tell where your precious gifts are ; never forget to use them, and if you are in trouble, as I think you will be, take the box in your left hand, and with your right put the net on your head, and you will be invisible too." Frostybelle promised to remember her mother's directions, and bid her good-bye, and the Queen was very sad when she was gone, for though she knew nothing about the kind of magic Flittertit and Bonglebore practised, there was another kind lying hid away in her heart that made her feel sure her daughter would be in danger. Everything, however, had been done that the King could think of, to make the journey safe and pleasant, and all the country people came out to see the long procession that escorted Princess Preciosa on her way. There were

elephants covered with nets of gold, with gold and silver seats on their backs for people to travel in, and brown camels carrying wicker baskets slung across them, full of good things to eat and drink, and courtiers and ladies on horseback, and servants on foot, and besides all these, the two magicians, who rode on black horses, one on each side of the Princess, watching everything she said and did. They were always very polite and respectful in their way of speaking, for they knew that it would be many days before they would be beyond the boundaries of her father's kingdom; but at last, after they had travelled for a long time, they reached the edge of the Barren Land, or Land of Sand, a corner of which they had to cross, as Bongleboe had said. The courtiers did not at all like going into this unknown country, for it had a very bad name, owing to the difficulties and dangers of travelling there; there was no help for it, however, and they were comforted by seeing that for one day, at least, their road lay beside a river. Such an ugly river it was though, not a bit like the merry streams in Silverland, but slow and dull, with nothing on its banks but long brown grass, and here and there a

great brown creature with a huge head and long mouth full of sharp teeth, drying itself lazily in the sun. Next day they turned their backs on the river, and went on and on across the sand, till some of the ladies began to complain, and some of the courtiers accused the magicians of leading them astray, for there were no hills to be seen, nothing but brown sand, which the wind caught up here and there, and whirled along in tall pillars that seemed ready to fall over and smother the travellers. Flittertit and Bonglebores, too, began to get cross and ill-mannered, though as yet they did not venture to be rude to the Princess, in case she should turn and go home again ; in fact, to her they did their best to be agreeable, so that she should be willing to go alone with them up the hills. Just as the sun was setting one night, they bade her look far away on the edge of the sky, and there she saw what looked first like a pink cloud, then like a gold cloud with blue shadows, then like a cold grey cloud with bluer shadows still ; and that they told her was the first sight of the hills. Every day afterwards the rose and gold and blue grew brighter, till they began to see the rocks and trees, and at last they

were close to the foot of the mountains, while far away behind them lay the terrible Barren Land. By this time, almost all their horses were lame, their food was half done, and when they halted for the night, a great number of the courtiers and ladies came to Frostybelle and begged to be allowed to go home again, for they said they would die if they stayed there, and they thought she ought to go back too.

"What! go back now!" said Frostybelle, "that I will never do—besides, I long to be up among the cold beautiful snow; I want to see it and feel it, whether I find a heart there or not. But you, poor frightened people, had better get home again as fast as you can; only, how are you to find your way? think of the miles and miles of brown sand without a track of any sort."

Then Duke Fussling, one of the courtiers, said softly—

"So, please you, I thought we should all be glad to get back, so I brought a man of the Barren Land with me to show us the way."

"Very well, Fussling," said Frostybelle, "you will leave my pages and body-guard behind, and everybody else who likes to go may be off to-morrow morning."

So, when the sun rose far, far away, and was just beginning to make the long brown sand bright, the procession set out homewards, with a tall silent man wrapped in a brown blanket at their head, and neither Frostybelle nor anyone else knew that he had been ordered by the magicians to lead them all astray in the barren country. Those who remained behind were very sorry for themselves, all but one little page named Dart, and one maid of honour named Dewbell, and these two would have followed the Princess anywhere in all the world. When the silent man had gone with his party, those who remained sat down to breakfast, and Flittertit offered the Princess some tea.

“I made it myself, your Royal Highness, and I am sure it is good.”

The Princess turned to Dart, who went forward with her moonbeam cup to be filled.

“Oh, I have poured out the tea,” said Flittertit, handing him another.

“Her Royal Highness prefers her own, thank you,” said Dart; and taking the tea from Flittertit’s hand, he poured it into the moonbeam cup, which instantly turned grey. Dart held it so that Frostybelle could

see it, and when she noticed the change of colour she said, looking the magician straight in the face—

“Dart, make me some good tea, and throw away that poison.”

Flittertit turned pale, for he had not known the power of the cup, and was startled at finding his attempt discovered; however, as Frostybelle had purposely spoken low, and took no more notice of the affair, he recovered himself, and went to his brother after breakfast to complain of his ill-luck.

“I told you so,” said Bonglebores; “exactly six hundred and ninety-nine years ago the same thing happened to a magician who tried to poison the King of Foozledom.”

“What is that to me,” answered Flittertit, sharply, “Frostybelle is not the King of Foozledom! Now let me tell you that whoever in future years reads the account I shall write of this expedition, will say that I took every proper precaution.”

“Only you didn’t succeed,” replied Bonglebores; “better remember our compact, and let *me* try.”

So that day Bonglebores sent his brother to ride with Dart and Dewbell, and try to discover where the cup

was kept, while he rode beside Frostybelle and began to talk in a confidential sort of way.

"I am afraid your Highness made an unpleasant discovery this morning at breakfast."

"Very unpleasant," said the Princess shortly.

"Ah, my dear young lady, I have often wished to warn you before against my brother ; he is not to be depended on, and is, in fact, rather light in the head ; of late he has taken a dislike to your Royal Highness, but I assure you it is a mere madman's fancy, and with me you are safe ; besides, as I know where the plant grows that we are looking for, we can do without him." Just then it seemed fortunate for Frostybelle that she was unable to feel, for had she been like other people she would have been dreadfully frightened ; as it was, she only thanked the magician for his kind speech and rode on quietly, but at night she told Dart and Dewbell what had happened.

Next morning at breakfast Flittertit was not to be seen, but Bongleboore brought a nice fresh fish he had caught in a stream that day, and begged the Princess to eat. She put some on her plate and was going to begin, but she found that whenever she was about to

put a bit into her mouth, it always fell off her fork into the plate again.

"This fish seems difficult to eat, Dewbell," said she, "please bring me my knife."

"Here is one," said Bonglebore, hastily.

"Thank you, I prefer my own," answered Frostybelle, who wanted to make sure the fish was poisoned, and laid Roni's knife across it. Directly she did so the blade turned black, so the Princess handed the plate to Dewbell, and said quietly, "Bring me some breakfast, Dewbell, and fling away that poison."

This time it was Bonglebore's turn to be startled and he hurried away to his brother, who began to tell him how people would laugh at him when they read the history of his attempt to poison the Princess. Of course Bonglebore grew angry, and the two brothers had such a quarrel that Frostybelle was near finding out all their plans ; however, they stopped scolding after a while, and Bonglebore went off to try and get hold of the knife and fork while Flittertit rode beside the Princess.

"I am grieved, indeed, to hear that your Highness got some fish that was poisoned this morning," began

he, in a brisk manner ; " I suppose you know how that happened ? "

" No," replied Frostybelle.

" Well, my dear Princess, I have long wished to tell you that my brother is not to be trusted ; he is so thick-headed that, while trying to mix some charms this morning, he spilt a poisonous liquid over the fish meant for your breakfast, and did not notice it at the time ; however, as *I* am your friend, and know where the plant we want grows, we can do without him."

Frostybelle thought this so odd that she determined to get an opportunity of looking at the faces of the two magicians in her glass ; so the first time they stopped she called to Dewbell that she wanted to put up her hair again, and bade her bring the looking-glass. Dewbell did so, and her face was reflected in it, as she handed it to her mistress, with as bright a smile as you could wish to see. Frostybelle smiled back at her, and sat for a little playing with her hair and talking to Flittertit till he happened to pass behind her. " Come, and look at yourself in my glass," she cried, directly ; " you have no idea what a wonderful glass it is."

"Is it?" answered he, looking over her shoulder. "Your Royal Highness must be joking; for I can see nothing in it at all."

"Can't you? Try again; here, put your face right opposite to it."

Flittertit did so; but still the glass was blank, so, suspecting some magic, he called his brother too, which was exactly what Frostybelle wanted. When he, also, had stood before it without being able to see himself she rose, and, speaking in a clear voice, called her attendants round her and told them what had happened.

The two brothers were furiously angry; for they knew directly that they were not clever enough to destroy the power of Frostybelle's wonderful possessions, though they could prevent her servants from punishing their treachery. These all tried to persuade her to leave the magicians behind, and set out at once for Silverland; and Dart and Dewbell assured her that no good could come of the journey, and described how the brothers had tried to discover the secret of where the magic gifts were kept.

"You do not think I would turn back, when I have

come so far?" answered the Princess. "I should be ashamed to tell the King my father that his daughter had been so easily defeated. You must all remain here, since I cannot protect you; but you know that I am safe enough, and I will go alone to the hill-top and find the plant we want." As the Princess said this she looked up at the snow, and her eyes grew brighter, as if the mere sight of it did her good. "Indeed, I must get up there somehow!" she exclaimed; "for never should I rest if I went home without seeing what is across those rosy peaks."

It was all in vain that her attendants reasoned with her, and tried to alter her decision; but when Dart and Dewbell stepped forward and declared that where she went they would follow, Flittertit and Bonglebore stopped them with an ugly laugh.

"Not quite so fast, if you please. You must know that these hill-tops are in our hands for the present, and you will find that not one of you can pass that line of grey stones without our leave, and *that* you will never get. Your Princess goes alone with us."

Dart ran forward with some of the others to try, and found that for once the magicians had spoken

truly ; for, whenever they tried to pass the line of stones, their feet grew so heavy that they could not move a step, so, with many tears, they were obliged to remain behind while the Princess and the brothers prepared to set off together.

"We must have food for the way," said she ; "so, as no one else can come, I suppose you mean to carry it ?"

"Certainly, Princess," replied the brothers, who thought with delight that the magic gifts must either be left behind or be packed in the box they were to take ; for, of course, they did not know that the Princess carried them herself safely hidden under the invisible net.

The three set out and walked for many days, and each day's journey was more wonderful than the last. First there were bare rocks, with dark roaring torrents far down between them, and the path winding along on little ledges in the cliffs. Next came broken ground, where the stream was close at their feet, singing among great round stones, and under the brightest of green trees, while the sun shone through the leaves, and made the grass and moss as bright below ; then came

a solemn beautiful wood of tall firs, some of them with broad flat branches, some of them with long hanging sprays, and through this wood the Princess walked for a week, listening to the wind whispering the most wonderful low songs, and though she could not understand them all, she knew there was something about

“Oh, the white, white snow and the crimson flowers,”

and she kept repeating this to herself and wondering whether she would see anything like it. After the fir-wood she came to a curious narrow path winding up the face of a steep hill, and ending in a sharp turn which she thought must be the place where she would see right over the snow. Now ever since she had begun to travel alone the two brothers had kept rather out of sight, partly because they were a little afraid of her, partly because they could not agree as to what they were to do next ; and while she was walking day by day up the mountain a strange feeling had come into her mind, as though she should find something she wanted at the top. This feeling grew stronger and stronger as she went up the steep bank, and though she could hardly stir (she was so tired), she could not

stop till she reached the turning she had seen so far above her. There the path sunk suddenly between two high rocks, and when Frostybelle had passed them she forgot all about her weariness and cried out quite loud,

“Oh, the white, white snow,”

and then she sat down and looked and looked as if she could not gaze enough, and had the Queen been there she would have seen the same flush pass through the rubies that had once before made her believe her daughter would gain a heart in time.

This was what Frostybelle saw : brown and yellow rocks close to her, with beds of soft snow in their hollows, far below her the green trees, then the firs, then high rocks again with lines of crimson on them, and highest of all, great slopes of clear, white, sparkling snow, glittering like diamonds in the sun, and turning the softest pearly blue in the shade. What can those crimson things be, thought she, and she turned round to her other side and cried again,

“The white, white snow and the crimson flowers!”

There they were, indeed, great bushes with pointed

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CHAPTER III.

WHEN the Princess had looked for some time at the beautiful view she began to remember again how tired she was; and as it was cold at that height she rolled herself up in her cloak and lay down in a sheltered corner behind a rock, where she fell fast asleep, and dreamed that she saw herself grown taller and older, wearing on her head a crown of the crimson flowers, and saying to her mother that now her heart was found, and they would all be happy. She tried very hard in her dream to find out who it was that had given her the crown of flowers, but she could not tell, for whenever she glanced away from her mother she only saw a grey mist like that which floated on the hill-side, and out of this some one reached a hand with the crown.

When she awoke it was evening, the slopes of snow were pale gold and rose red, the shadows were

purple and blue, and all of a sudden Frostybelle saw in her mind's eye the long miles of level sand she had crossed, and knew that to the travellers who were following the silent man, the hills must be looking as lovely as when she used to watch them on her journey ; and for a moment she forgot Silverland, and thought she would stay for ever among the crimson flowers and the snow. Then, however, a voice at her ear roused her, and she remembered that even the hills would not be quite pleasant with the magicians for companions, so she resolved to lie still and listen to what they were saying, and try to find out for herself where the plant grew that was to cure her. Now this is what she heard :

“Ha, ha,” laughed Flittertit, warming his hands over a fire he had lighted, “when I think of all the stupidity of the Silverland folk I cannot stop laughing. To think of their having sent their precious Princess on such an errand ; ha, ha, ha !”

“Ha, ha,” echoed Bonglebores—and his laugh was like the fat noise a turkey cock makes—“they should have read a little more first, and then they wouldn't have been so easily taken in. Long ago——”

"Oh, bother long ago," said his brother; "never mind that, but let us settle what's to be done next. I say we had better kill the young lady, and be done with it."

"You goose, how should we know then where her magic gifts are? Poor old Mistiegate would have given a good deal to have had them, and we deserve them for our trouble. Now, I propose that we keep her here as our servant, and we shall soon break her spirit and make her tell us where they are. They must be about her dress, for she never carries anything with her, and yet she has her cup and knife and fork at dinner."

"Well, I don't see how a cup and a looking-glass can be hidden about her; still, your idea is not bad. But what about the plant? Shall we make her go and get some of the snow moss and eat it, or shall we tell her the whole thing is nonsense, and that if she ate acres of it her heart would be none the better? Mistiegate was very silly about that."

"Nay," said Bonglebone, "don't tell her it is nonsense, for in that case she may give us trouble. Let me manage it, and you shall see the result."

"Very well," answered Flittertit, "you speak better than I do, I allow, so I leave that to you, and will go to sleep."

Poor Frostybelle, hearing all this, was very angry and very unhappy; but still she thought she would surely manage to escape some day, and made up her mind to be as careful and good as possible in the meantime.

Next morning, after breakfast, Bonglebores made her a long speech, in which he assured her that he and Flittertit would search daily far and near for the marvellous plant that she needed; but that, as they would have to spend a great deal of time and trouble in looking for it, they thought she should help them to keep house, for they could not procure food and cook, and carry on the search as well. Frostybelle agreed to all they said, so Flittertit proceeded to show her where they were to live. This was in some large caves which ran under the snow-fields far into the rocks, and could only be approached by a very narrow path winding along a ledge which went sheer down on each side to a tremendous depth. One small cave Frostybelle took for herself, and there

she lived for six months, serving the magicians and learning a good deal that would never have been taught her in Silverland. There, of course, nobody scolded the King's daughter, but here she learned to be patient, and not to answer when she was scolded roughly. Here, too, she learnt to do hard work, and to be submissive and gentle in her way of speaking; whereas in Silverland she learnt nothing harder than lessons, and had been much too proud and sharp, because, having no feeling, she could not be expected to make allowances for other people; so that while the brothers thought they were ill-using her, they were in reality doing her a great deal of good.

Here we shall leave her till her sixteenth birthday, and take a look at the other people of our tale.

The silent man, having set out from the foot of the hills, led Duke Fussling and his party away across the Land of Sand for days and days, till they who were tired when they set out thought they would die of fatigue and hunger; and always as they went the sand seemed to stretch out farther and farther before them, and they followed and followed, more and more

slowly, as though the edge of the Barren Land were never more to be seen. At last, one afternoon, the wind, which had been puffing about in little, cruel, wild gusts, got up and began to blow in good earnest, and raise clouds of soft, fine sand that filled their eyes and mouths, so that they could scarcely breathe or see; then they looked behind them with frightened faces, and there were the terrible sand pillars whirling along towards them, and threatening to cover them up and bury them for ever. Then they began to lament that they had left their homes; and some said they were punished for the vanity that made them join the fine escort of the Princess, and some cried out, that, were they only at home again, they would be satisfied and not grumble as they used to do. And, meantime, the silent man had walked on and left them, intending to shelter himself as best he could from the storm behind a stone that was not far off.

When they saw that he was gone, their lamentations redoubled, till Duke Fussling spoke; and what he said was worthy of his high name at Court. He told them he was afraid they had all, including himself,

left Silverland for very bad reasons ; not because it was their duty or because they really wished to help the Princess, as they should have done, and, therefore, he thought the least they could do now was to be as brave as possible in their difficulties.

While he was speaking the sand pillars had come nearer and nearer, and the strong Wind, who was lying in the still space in the centre of one of them, heard the Duke's good speech, and, because of it, he gave out a breath that swept the pillars past the frightened travellers, and carried them on across the sand ; but one of them broke and nearly buried the silent man, after which the Wind went to sleep. Duke Fussling and his friends were delighted at their escape, you may be sure, and set out at once to look for their guide. When they had got him clear of the sand, and fed him, and bathed his face, he spoke for the first time, and told them how he had been desired by the magicians to lose them all in the Barren Land, and had taken them quite off their road. " But now," he added, " you have given back to me my life, and I will give back yours, and lead you straight to the clear waters and the green fields."

He kept his promise ; and just a year and a day from the time that they departed, the worn-out travellers, with thin faces and torn clothes, reached Silverland again, where there was great mourning for the loss of the Princess. Meantime, the body-guard, with Dart and Dewbell, waited impatiently for her to come back ; and at last, when some weeks had gone by, they held a council as to what they should do to help her. Captain Lancewell, who commanded her body-guard, was for marching boldly up the hill and taking her by force from the magicians ; and, when some of the others declared that they would do anything but that, he scolded them all soundly.

“ Pretty soldiers you are,” said he, “ who are afraid of the power of two wretched old men ! ”

“ Well, Captain Lancewell,” they replied, “ we will go where you choose, but perhaps you will not find it so easy as you think to get up the hill.”

Sure enough, however hard they tried they could not pass the line of grey stones, but only wandered along the mountain side, never getting one inch higher than when they started. This being the case, another council was called, and Dart and

Dewbell proposed that they should remain there, in case the Princess should come down again, while Captain Lancewell and his men should hurry back to the Court for help. This was pronounced the wisest thing they could do, so the guard marched away with many promises that they would come straight back with help to the faithful page and his companion, who set to work to make a little hut for themselves, where they lived, taking it in turns to keep constant watch, so that should there be any signs of Frostybelle's return, they might be ready to go and meet her. At the end of six months, when it was, as we have said, Frostybelle's sixteenth birthday, she was lying awake thinking how long her present life was to go on, and whether she could find no way of escaping from the brothers, when she heard their voices talking angrily at the entrance of the cave, and again determined to listen to what they were saying.

"I tell you, Bonglebore, it is nothing to laugh at! How on earth could we know what the Gnome told us to-day, that Frostybelle's mother is the favourite godchild of Fairy Everbright. Of course we shall

get into a mess because of this ; for you know, just as well as I do, that we are only magicians in a very small way, and there's more talk than anything else in what we do."

"Of course, and therefore we must settle this matter one way or another ; and my advice is, that we should quietly get rid of the Princess and be off over there into Rubyland, where no one will care to follow us."

"All very well, but how is it to be done ; nothing will make her eat or drink without using her knife and cup, and how do we know how many more such things she may have, hidden as cleverly."

"Bah !" what so easy as to push her off the ledge at the mouth of the cave ; see now, leave it to me again. I'll go and fetch firewood early, and call her to help me carry it in ; when she comes you follow her and push her over."

Frostybelle shuddered when she heard this, and though her want of feeling prevented her hating the brothers as anyone else would have done, she thought if she could, by the aid of her invisible net, lead them into any mischief she would be doing no harm ; so

she lay awake all night wondering why her mother had not told her about the good fairy, and thinking how she should outwit the magicians. Early in the morning she got up, and taking her magic gifts from a hole in the rock where she kept them under the net, she crept out of the cave, and going softly along the rocky ledge, placed herself behind a bush so that she could see the path. As soon as the sun was fairly up Bonglebores came out, and after yawning and stretching himself for a little, so as to get his wits well awake, he took up some pieces of firewood and walked along the ledge, then turned round facing the cave and called loudly for Frostybelle, who saw that Flittertit was peeping from the further entrance, watching for her to appear. After Bonglebores had called for some time in vain, he got angry and desired his brother to go to her cave and make her get up. Flittertit accordingly looked in, but he no sooner saw the cave was empty than he hurried along the ledge and told Bonglebores he was sure she had run away.

Frostybelle almost laughed loud as she saw the two faces looking uglier and more vexed than ever before, for though she had often seen them in a rage,

they were now in a rage and a fright too, and these two things together make short work of anybody's good looks. However, as she had made up her mind what to do, she stepped from behind the bush and called out—

“Good morning to you both ; I'm not coming down just at present.”

Shaking their fists furiously at her, the magicians set off in pursuit of the Princess, who, being very active, clambered up the highest peak near, and stood there a moment, so that they should see her ; then taking her box in her left hand, she put the net on her head with her right, and crouched down on the ground. Soon after she heard Bongleboore and Flittertit panting and puffing up the slope, and when they reached the top and could not see her they began to declare that she must have fallen over, for that no human being could descend the cliff on that side.

While they were arguing, a soft white cloud appeared half way down the side, and a voice came out of it laughing merrily. The brothers stretched their necks to look over the edge, and fancied they

saw the Princess in the cloud, which they supposed was another bit of magic ; so it was, but it was the work of the Fairy Everbright, who being able to assist the Princess once and once only in her life, thought the time was come to make use of her power. She therefore deluded the magicians into the belief that Frostybelle herself was before them, and Flittertit shouting "Where she can go I will," began to scramble down the cliff. Bonglebore followed, but his weight was too great for the loose stones on which he stepped, and they slipped from under him, so that he rolled down on his brother, and they were both lost in the black water that flowed hundreds of feet below.

As Frostybelle was gazing at the place where she lost sight of them, Everbright in her white cloud alighted softly on the peak, and told her that the two brothers had been taken out of the river by Roni and carried away to his palace underground, where they would be his servants till they should learn to be sorry for their evil ways, and become fit to return to the sunshine ; she then praised Frostybelle for her good behaviour, and bade her hasten to the foot of the mountain, where Dart and Dewbell awaited her.

"Only let me gather some of the crimson flowers before I go," said the Princess; "ah! I wish I could see Rubyland, it looks so beautiful!"

Now Rubyland was the country on the other side of the hills, over which the mist had never ceased to hang like a grey veil. The Fairy smiled and gave Frostybelle leave to gather the flowers, but added—

"They will be no use to you yet, my child, for they will die in a day."

In another hour, with her box in one hand and a cluster of flowers in the other, the Princess began her homeward journey, and now she found her arrow come into use, for wherever the path seemed doubtful she had only to lay it on the ground and say "Show me the road to Dart and Dewbell," and it turned and pointed in the direction she ought to follow.

Down the bank with many a glance behind, through the tall fir-wood and by the stream she went; and now the songs of the water and the trees were easier to understand than before, but there was one she repeated to herself over and over again, for the sound of it pleased her, though the sense she could not quite make out—

dust in the distance, out of which, as they got nearer, came a long train of dark objects moving across the sand. You may imagine how pleased the wanderers were to recognise the dress of the guard, and how eagerly Captain Lancewell jumped off his horse and knelt down to kiss the hand of the Princess. The best elephant was brought for her, and she insisted on having Dewbell beside her, while Dart, on another, with the golden arrow in his hand, led the way; and so, with great rejoicings, they reached the court of Silverland, where her father and mother were so glad to have Frostybelle back, that they almost forgot to be sorry that she had not learnt how to feel as they did.

There we must leave her for a little, and take a peep below the grey mist that had prevented her seeing into the fair country across the snowy hills.

CHAPTER IV.

RUBYLAND was the name of this country, and some people said it was more beautiful than Silverland itself. It was a country of flowers, for up on the snowy hills, as you know, were the crimson flowers Frostybelle admired; lower down, the slopes were covered with a small purple blossom that made them look like huge amethysts; the grain the people ate was a beautiful crimson and pale gold, and nowhere in all the world were there such roses as in Rubyland. You might think that one would get tired of so much bright colour, but that was impossible; for on the glowing hillsides were hollows and dells, where little brown streams trickled, keeping the ground wet and cool, so that the ferns and grasses grew long and tall and were all of the deepest green; then there were small lakes with long trailing willows looking at themselves in the water, and sheltering

beds of pure white water-lilies, that seemed to be dreaming on their broad green leaves. There were groves of horse-chesnuts, too, with their beautiful white blossoms, followed by the warm brown fruit, so that, though the country was called Rubyland, there were plenty of cool quiet corners and delicate flowers to please the people as well as the famous roses.

Now, the King and Queen of the land had died many years before the time of which we write, leaving the kingdom to their son Prince Ruberfranc; but he was quite a child, and too young, therefore, to know how to govern himself, so of course he was not fit to govern the nation. Affairs were, therefore, left to the care of the Vizier Authenos, a very wise and good old man, who, moreover, was cõmmanded to train the young Prince in all the ways of wisdom. Authenos fulfilled his master's expectations, for he ruled the kingdom well, making just laws and punishing wrong; while at fifteen the Prince was as brave and gentle and true as his teacher. On his fifteenth birthday Authenos told him it was time he should see the world, and search for a Princess who should be a fitting Queen for him when he should ascend

his father's throne ; so for five years Ruberfranc travelled from one country to another, studying the different habits and customs of the nations, and trying to find a Princess to marry. Not one of them pleased him, however, for they had not had as good training as he. One was very pretty, but she thought so much of herself on that account that she had no room in her head for anything else. One was very rich, but she was so proud that she believed the whole nation should be at her service ; and when the Prince told her that he thought the King should serve the nation, she said he must be mad. Another had a bad temper, and a fourth was fond of nothing but dress ; so that when he got home Ruberfranc told Authenos that there was not a Princess in the world, except one, that was worth the trouble of a journey.

“ And who is that one ? ” asked Authenos, anxiously.

“ Princess Preciosa of Silverland.”

“ Oh, my son,” cried the old Vizier, “ how can you dream of her ! Do you not know she is the victim of an old witch, who has destroyed her power of loving like other people ? ”

"True, Authenos ; but do you know that some one may be able to cure her ?"

"Yes, I know all about it, and that imprisonment for life, and the loss of all happiness, is the punishment of those who fail. Remember, Ruberfranc, that in one year more you must begin to rule your kingdom alone. You surely will not be so false to the precepts I have taught you as to risk your life and abandon your duty for the sake of a Princess you have never seen !"

"My dear old Authenos, I shall not abandon that duty, only fulfil another, for you yourself taught me that it is the duty of all brave gentlemen to succour people in distress ; and what distress can be worse than the want of a heart ? Besides, something tells me I shall succeed where all others have failed, and that the day will come when you will welcome my Queen, who brings me not only a heart but a kingdom."

Authenos wrung his hands, and implored the Prince to abandon his purpose, but in vain ; so, seeing that he could not prevent him from going to Silverland, he next proposed that he should send emissaries

beforehand, to try and make easier terms for the Prince, in case he should not be able to cure the Princess; but to this also Ruberfrance refused to listen.

These five years, Authenos," said he, "I have travelled according to your orders and obeyed you in everything. You were right to send me as you did with a number of my nobles to attend me; but experience has taught me that a very different reception would be given me did I go without them. I once paid a visit to the court of King Marlet in disguise, and nobody cared much about me, though they all declared the Prince of Rubyland was the most perfect Prince living. Now I am determined that when I marry, my Queen shall learn to like me for myself and not for my kingdom, so I go to Silverland alone: do not betray where I am gone, lest some one should talk of it and the King find me out; do not fear for me, but give me the crimson crown and let me go."

"What! the magic crown of flowers! Do you mean to take that with you on this foolish errand?"

"Certainly I do, for I know I shall want it. Come

Authenos, I have never grieved you yet, trust me for once, for I have had a wonderful dream, in which I saw myself placing our crown on Preciosa's head, and I shall never rest till I have seen her."

"Well, well!" sighed the old Vizier, "this is the saddest day I have seen, but no doubt you are old enough to do what you will."

So saying, he unlocked the great Treasure House, and took out a small crimson velvet box, which he handed to Ruberfranc, who bid him a smiling farewell and set out on his journey, attended only by two faithful servants whom he could trust to be silent.

Now in that velvet box was a wreath of the crimson flowers that grew on the top of the Snowy Hills, and it was counted the greatest treasure in Rubyland. It was made by a fairy hundreds of years before, who, when she had woven the blossoms and their dark leaves into a crown, gave it to the King who then reigned in Rubyland, and told him that the flowers would remain fresh and bright as long as the Queens of the country were worthy to wear them, but would fade and die should they cease to deserve them. Only once since then had any of the flowers withered, and as the wicked

Queen died and left a daughter to rule in her place, the moment the crown was set on the head of the child Queen the crimson came back and the withered petals revived, to the great delight of the councillors, who had feared lest their beautiful wreath should never bloom again.

Prince Ruberfranc, having reached the chief city of Silverland, went to live in disguise in a poor part of the town, and gave out that he was a stranger in search of a stolen treasure, and that he intended to stay awhile and rest before proceeding on his way. He then made enquiries about the Princess, and soon heard all that the people around him could tell ; nor did he fail to observe that many were discontented at the prospect of having a Queen to rule over them so unlike anyone else. After he had gathered all the information he could he went to the palace, dressed in very poor clothes, and with an old brown cloak wrapped about him, and there he waited near the gate in the hope of seeing the Princess.

After some time the King rode out with a train of attendants, and Ruberfranc immediately knelt down in the road and begged to present a petition to the

King. Some of the courtiers tried to push him away, but the King saw him, and bid them let the poor man speak ; so the Prince rose, and making a courtly bow, went up to the King's side and said—

“Please your Majesty, I am a poor stranger, but I pray you let no one hear my petition.”

The King thought this was a curious request, but he ordered everyone to stand back, and then, stooping down, asked what the stranger wanted.

“So please you, I am seeking a lost treasure, and I think I may find it near your palace.”

“There are no thieves in my palace, sirrah,” answered the King.

“Far be it from me to say so, King ; nevertheless, I think I may find my treasure there, or at least hear something of it. I pray your Majesty to allow me access to the gardens for a few days, and say nothing of my petition, lest I should fail.”

The good-natured monarch agreed to this and rode on, after giving the needful order, and the happy Prince hurried directly into the garden, where he had been told that Preciosa, not long since returned from the Snowy Mountains, passed much of

her time, and where he hoped at last to see her. After waiting for a while, and wandering about among the winding paths, his patience was rewarded, for at a little distance he saw the Princess, with a group of her ladies and pages round her, and Dart and Dewbell, as usual, close at her side.

CHAPTER THE LAST.

PRECIOSA was gathering flowers, so the Prince watched her for a while, till she sent to ask who he was, as strangers were not admitted into her garden.

Then he advanced with a low bow, and said—

“You are the Princess who cannot feel?”

“Yes,” answered the Princess, who was rather surprised at his familiar way of addressing her.

“And I hear you have tried all sorts of cures, will you be pleased to tell me what they are, and perhaps I can find a better one.”

Then Frostybelle told him all that had happened, and while she spoke he was looking at her steadily.

When she had done, he said earnestly—

“Do you really want to be cured, or do you think you are better off without feeling?”

“How can I tell till I have tried?” replied she.

"I do want to be cured, for I think I should be sorry for myself if I could, since mamma and the people are troubled about me."

"That is all right," cried the Prince, "then, Princess, I am going to cure you! I am not going to give you anything to eat or drink, or ask you to do anything at all; you must let me set about it in my own way; look me straight in the face, and I will tell you what I am going to do."

Frostybelle looked at him, still more surprised and more inclined to be angry at his way of speaking, but he looked back at her steadily, and said, slowly—

"I am just going to love you, Princess!"

And then he quietly went away.

"This is very extraordinary," she exclaimed, and went and told the Queen, adding, "do you know, mamma, when he looked at me, something in my heart went faster."

The Queen was so delighted when she heard this, she could hardly help saying so, but she did not like to hope too much, so she only kissed her daughter and sent her away, saying she would enquire about this

unknown adventurer, who was so bold in his speech. As soon, however, as she saw the King, she cried, "Oh, my dear, I think the cure is found at last," and told him what had occurred, and it was terribly disappointing to find that he was by no means pleased.

"What! marry the Princess of Silverland to that strange man in the old brown cloak! What next, I wonder!"

"Oh hush, King! he may be a magician, and if he hears you he will go away, and our poor Preciosa will never be able to feel, because of your pride!"

"You are right, my dear," answered the King, "I ought to know better than to care about the man's looks, but you must confess, Queen, his cloak *is* very shabby!"

Then the court herald was sent to see where the Prince lived, and who he was, but he brought back word that he was a stranger, and no one could tell where he came from, and with that they were obliged to be content. Ruberfranc, on his part, used to come every day when the Princess was in the garden, and sit watching her from under a great linden tree, and at

last, when she had begun to wonder how long this was to go on, he went up to her, and said—

“Princess, I love you ; do you love me a little?”

Then she, looking up, laughed merrily ; and her laugh was like the sound of icicles striking against each other, as she answered, “You know I cannot tell what you mean,” so the Prince walked off. Next day he asked the same question, and her laugh was like the trickling of water when the ice begins to melt, but she still said, “I do not understand you.” Next day, when he came, she did not speak at all, but stood silent, and when he watched her she shivered, and gave a sigh, like a wind before a thaw, while a faint, a very faint flush passed through the rubies round her throat. For two days after this he did not come at all ; at first, Preciosa wondered why he was not there, then wished he would come, but the third day she went down to the linden tree alone, and leaning against it, sighed so that one thought of a winter’s ice breaking up in the sun. When she had waited there a little, the Prince, who was hidden behind a jasmine hedge, came up, and said softly in her ear, “What is the matter, Princess?”

“That is what I do not know.”

"Perhaps I can tell you; turn round and look at me."

Frostybelle turned round, but when she had glanced at him a moment she sighed again, and looked down on the grass. Then he smiled, and said, "Princess I love you very much; don't you love me a little?"

As he spoke she looked up again and gave a cry, "Ah, what have you done—I feel—I feel!" and with that she fell forward, but he caught her and carried her in to the King and Queen, who almost wept for joy. While they were trying to restore Frostybelle to consciousness, Ruberfranc hastened to his servants, whom he had desired to have everything ready for him, as he felt sure of his success. Then he put on one of his own court costumes, and carrying the box with the flower crown in his hands, he went back to the palace and took it out just as the Princess opened her eyes. As soon as she saw him kneeling beside her with the crown in his hands, she exclaimed, "My dream come true! It was you who were to give me the crimson flowers!"

"And I dreamt too that you were to wear them," said he, smiling; and then he told her the history of

the crimson crown, and declared that he was sure no Queen had kept the petals brighter than they would be on Preciosa's head. After this they were all so happy that they went that very afternoon to Windybrae, where, as they sat on the green banks and had time to notice Preciosa's clothes (for at first they had only looked at her face), they saw that her white robe had changed to the colour of an opal, and that the rubies seemed to be throbbing with crimson light.

* * * * *

I have not much more to tell you, for when people are quite happy there is nothing left that can be told. The King was delighted when he found that the Princess was going to marry the Prince of Rubyland, instead of a poor man in a shabby cloak; and he called his councillors together and bade them make arrangements for a great festival, at which the people should be solemnly informed of the alliance between the two kingdoms. Of course the good news had spread all over the country, and the crowds that assembled filled the city, and made the streets as gay as could be.

In front of the palace was a great silver balcony, where the kings of Silverland always sat to give audience after they were crowned, and below this the people gathered on a beautiful day to hear the King speak. He and the Queen came forward first, and told them of their great good fortune, and how the two kingdoms would be joined in one; and then he said that Preciosa (Frostybelle no longer) would come and let them all see the change in her.

With that he stood aside, and the Prince stepped out, leading the Princess by the hand, clad in the wonderful feather robe, brilliant as when it was made, with the rubies and diamonds flashing on her neck, and the crown of Rubyland flowers on her brow. At first everyone began to say, "What a beautiful dress!" but as soon as they looked at her face they were silent with wonder, for if the light on her jewels was lovely, the light in her eyes was more marvellous still. She had grown so beautiful she did not look like the same creature, and the smile that hovered on her lips was as the trembling of the dawn on a fair lake, while the colour on her cheeks was as delicate as the heart of a fresh blush rose. After a

moment one loud shout went up, and then was hushed, for she leant over the balcony to speak, the Prince looking on the while with the happiest face that had been seen there for many and many a day.

“My people,” she began, “I cannot tell you in words what the change in me is, I can only show you by my deeds that winter is gone, and I feel”—here something filled her heart too full, and she only stretched out her arms to them with the smile still on her mouth and the tears glistening in her eyes.

There was another silence, for there were tears on many faces in the street, but then the shouts began again, and never was heard such delight or such music as rose that day from the city; while people who had quarrelled made friends, and Wordmen and Muddle-men and Rumpusmen shook hands and agreed to forget their differences in honour of the nation's joy. Indeed so great was the gladness that reigned, that no one perceived a bright cloud sweep over the hill behind the palace and float away again as quickly as it came; nor was it known, till long after, that at that

moment the good Fairy Everbright had come, and telling Witch Nevercontent that her day was over, carried her and her hideous trumpeter away to a country more suited to her than the happy kingdoms of Silverland and Rubyland.

ELSIE'S RIDES.

KIND Farmer Ridley always allowed little Elsie Mayne and her mamma to sit in his big field close to their cottage, and a pleasant field it was, with two beautiful sycamores in one corner of it, where mamma could work comfortably in the shade, while Elsie played among the grass and flowers. She had companions too, in the field ; sometimes there were nice large-eyed brown cows there, sometimes soft sheep that nibbled the grass daintily, sometimes merry lambs that played at hide and seek with her behind the trees. What she enjoyed most, however, was to see the field in hay. It was true that while grass was growing she was obliged to stay under the trees, because Farmer Ridley did not wish it to be trampled, but the fun afterwards quite rewarded her for this little restriction. The mowers came to cut the hay

when it was ready, and the ringing sound they made in sharpening their scythes woke Elsie at six in the morning. It was quite a sight to see them take their dinners out of bright tins that flashed in the sun, as they carried them away to the shade under the sycamores, and after a while, when they began work again, they were followed by women in red and blue petticoats, white jackets, and sun bonnets, who tossed the hay about, that it might be dried by the sun and wind. Elsie spent all her time in the hay-field, and helped to toss out the sweet smelling crop in the morning, and gather it into heaps at night, and she grew so fond of her work that when the carts came at length to take the hay home she could not help beginning to cry. Farmer Ridley saw her though, and told her if she would be a good girl, she should have a ride on the last cart. How delightful that ride was! She was perched up very high on the soft load, and a girl sat beside her to see that she did not fall off; so she felt quite safe, and could look down comfortably on the broad backs of the strong horses, and on the top of the farmer's straw hat,

and even noticed that the flowers along the roadside appeared quite small, she was so far above them. Nor was that the end of her pleasure, for she stayed to watch the men cleverly building the great brown stacks ; and at last, when it was quite supper time, Mrs. Ridley took her to the dairy, and gave her a cup of warm new milk. Elsie thought all this must have happened a very very long time ago ; for she could remember since then, one season when the field was muddy, and was filled with large turnips, and another summer when there was corn in it. She did not like the reaping nearly so well as the hay-making, for the sun was so hot it used to make her head ache, and she didn't care to go out. After that, her field was sown with grass again, and just now was looking its very best, with quite a fringe of beautiful wild flowers growing in the low hedge that surrounded it. There was a road beyond the hedge on one side of the field, and beyond that again a little lodge, built close to two high gates that closed in another road, browner and softer than the first, and down which mamma had

once or twice taken Elsie, when the woman who lived at the lodge had asked them in. To-day, the great gates were open, and presently she heard and saw something, the like of which she had never seen before. First, there was a soft, quick sound; an even patter, patter, that made her look over the hedge, then the lodge-keeper hurried out, wearing a new gown and a clean apron, and stood shading her eyes with her hand, and watching a little pony that was coming up the soft avenue. On it came, speeding along as fast as ever it could, and carrying on its back a little girl, whose blue habit and long fair hair floating in the wind, made Elsie feel quite puzzled, they moved so rapidly. She galloped through the gates, calling merrily to the woman as she passed, rode straight on across the high road, and more wonderful still, leapt right over the hedge into Elsie's field. When the little rider saw Elsie, she half stopped, and exclaimed "Oh, dear!" with another merry laugh; but then she hurried on again, and was soon out of sight behind the willows near Farmer Ridley's house. After her, came a man on

a big horse, and he too jumped over the hedge, but his horse's feet made ugly holes in the ground, as he galloped away. Elsie could not tell what to make of it, so she ran to mamma under the sycamore, and asked, all out of breath, "Mamma, was that little girl a fairy?"

"No darling, she's a little girl like you."

"What is her name?"

"She is called Lady Emily; she is a daughter of Lord Netley's, to whom that road belongs."

Elsie stood and thought for a minute, and then said, "It must be very nice to have a pony. Why don't I have one?"

"Because you don't have many things that people can buy who live in very big houses. I cannot afford to give you a pony."

Again Elsie stood and thought, and suddenly remembered a picture of an old man riding a donkey, which suggested another hope to her, so she asked gravely, "Nor a donkey either, mamma?"

"No, my child," said Mrs. Mayne, smiling and patting her cheek; "but my Elsie looks quite as happy running round her field as Lady Emily does

riding. You must just pretend, and be pony and rider too."

It was certainly true that Elsie had often pretended to ride, and been very happy, but now she couldn't get the idea of the blue habit out of her head, and besides, were she to pretend ever so, she couldn't jump over that hedge. Indeed, she began to feel as though she were shut in too tight by that nasty hedge, and wish that she could get outside it.

Perhaps mamma, who almost always guessed what Elsie was thinking about, found this out too, for she put away the socks she was darning, and called out, "Little one, would you like to go and see Mrs. Walters' chickens?"

"Oh, yes, mamma," cried Elsie, clapping her hands, and away she trotted to the little cottage where old Mrs. Walters lived. There she was soon busy counting eleven wee, wee chickens, seven of them brown, and three gray, and one white, who were all pecking gently at some nice yellow food laid ready for them, while a lot of little ducklings, covered with short soft quills, were tumbling into a shallow tin of water and scrambling out at the

other side, when they waddled off with a funny shake of their little dumpy tails. While this was going on, Elsie was so happy she forgot the wish for a pony, but when she reached home and was getting tea, she began to think about it again; she tried not to let mamma see it, however, for she knew it would vex her; so she helped to put away some work, and made herself very useful till bedtime. Then, when she was tucked into her small white bed, she let herself think the matter over, and as she shut her eyes she said to herself, "Perhaps, if I pretend very hard, I may make myself fancy I am riding."

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THE FIRST RIDE.

"EL—SIE! EL—SIE!" called a voice; and as Elsie looked round to see where it came from, she heard again the patter, patter, that the pony's feet had made in the afternoon: but this time the sound was much softer, and was somehow a downy sort of noise. "El—sie! El—sie!" she heard again; and something white and brown and shiny began to appear in the distance, and as it came nearer she saw it was another pony with a rider quite different to Lady Emily. In fact, when it stopped in front of her, Elsie was inclined to think that the lady must have tumbled right out of the moon.

"You wanted a ride, my child, and here I am to give you one."

The speaker's voice was wonderfully pleasant, and made one think of rustling grass in the moonlight; her eyes were clear, and yet deep; and her dress

was shiny, and silvery, and grey, and white, all at once.

"Are you?" said Elsie; and she was so much surprised she could not get out another word.

"Yes, I'm Fairy Moonbeam, and I go about giving people things they can't get without me; so jump out of bed and come away."

"But I haven't got anything on except my night-gown, and that won't do to ride in; and, besides, what am I to ride upon?" asked Elsie.

"Oh, I'll settle all that. This is my pony, Gleam, and there's another just coming for you; and as for your night-gown, here, take this—" and the fairy flung something over Elsie's head, and she found herself dressed in a beautiful habit of a pale blue, with soft grey edges. "Well, this *is* nice, and I declare here's the pony!" exclaimed she. True enough, up trotted a little grey pony with a pretty saddle and bridle on, and he rubbed his soft nose on Elsie's arm, as if to tell her he belonged to her.

"His name is Dapple, now up with you; you don't know how, I see, so I will lift you." The fairy just touched Elsie and in a moment she was on Dapple's

back, with her foot in the stirrup and the bridle in her hand.

"Now, where shall we ride?" asked Moonbeam.

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Elsie. "Where can one ride?"

"To Everywhere, to Anywhere, or into Nowhere, if you like; perhaps, I had better show you something new, so as to accustom you to riding; what do you say to visiting the clouds?"

"The clouds! Oh, dear me, I'd like that, can I see the other side?"

"Of course you can; come Gleam!"

Away went the two ponies, Gleam the least bit in front, with his eye on Elsie sometimes, to see how she was getting on. Patter, patter, slowly at first, then quicker and quicker, till they were going at a swinging canter, and Elsie wished she could sing, she felt so happy. Out over the field that looked so sound asleep without the sunshine; over the farm, where even the smoke had gone to sleep too; over the tops of the trees, yes right over mamma's own sycamore they went, and Elsie fancied the leaves whispered Good-night as she passed. Lady Emily

never had a pony able to do anything like this, Elsie was quite sure ; and the strangest part of it was that, though they kept going higher and higher, Gleam and Dapple went along as easily as though they had been on level turf.

“ I wish this could go on always,” said Elsie at last, “ do you always keep on riding ? ”

“ No, not quite, always would be too long, even for a ride ; sometimes I have a rest, and only get out for a single trot to keep Gleam in good humour ; but this is one of my long nights.”

“ Oh, will it be a very long one indeed ? ”

“ Long enough for your little head to think about when it is over.”

“ But how am I to get home again ? ”

“ When it is time for me to go to bed, I will take you home.”

“ Where do you go to bed, though ? and why are you not in bed now ? ”

“ I told you I come out at night to give people things they can't get without me ; no one in the world can give quite the same beautiful gifts that I can. I go to bed at different times and in different

places, but I cannot show you where, and if I were to tell you, you would not understand."

"That is strange," said Elsie, and she was silent for a while; then she asked, "Have you any sisters?"

"Thousands."

"Dear me! how do you know them all."

"Oh, we never make mistakes. Here is one coming now, but I do not think you can see her. Look this way."

"I don't see anybody there at all."

"Most likely not; you are not accustomed yet to being among us; stop, Gleam! Now Elsie, look down there into that water, and tell me what you see."

Elsie stopped her pony too, at least she thought she did, but he was so well behaved, he stood still of his own accord, when the fairy spoke to Gleam. Then she leant over and looked down, and far below her she saw a lake, with dark trees all round it, and dark water lying quite still, except where the reflection of a star made a long wavering line of light. "I see a light," said she. "Yes," re-

plied Moonbeam, "that's one of my sisters: she is looking at herself in the water, as you would in a glass. She's quite a child still, but she is very fair and bright; look just above the lake, and perhaps you will make her out." Elsie lifted her head a little, and saw a child, or a star, or both, she could not tell one from the other.

"That is all you can see of her to-night," said Moonbeam, "for we must go on, or you won't get above the clouds in time."

Away went the ponies again, and soon Elsie saw long clouds not very far above her head; they had looked quite black to her when she was farther down, but here they seemed to be only dark grey with bright edges. Up and up they went, till Dapple's fore-feet were resting on the edge: then he gave a bound, and there they were, where Elsie had always wanted to be—on the other side of the clouds. They paused a moment to look, and presently Moonbeam asked, "What do you think of it, Elsie, and what is it like?"

"Oh, I don't know; it's like my field when the snow is lying very deep, and it is like the white

down in mamma's silk quilt, and it is like white water lilies; and, oh dear, oh dear, how beautiful it is up in the sky!"

"Is this quite as nice, then, as the ride you were wishing for to-day, my child?"

"Much, much nicer! How good of you to come for me, Moonbeam!"

Moonbeam looked pleased, but she only said—

"You have not had one gallop yet, such as we call a gallop. Come along, and we'll have one now we'll go to the end of this cloud."

Once more they set off, and it felt as if a wind were blowing them along, they went so fast, and yet there was another wind tumbling all their hair about and laughing in their faces. Swing, swing, gallop, gallop, went the two little ponies, sometimes flinging their heads up in the air, sometimes bending them down, as if they wanted to loosen their bridles, and go still faster. Sometimes Gleam would be in front, and Moonbeam would look back through her long hair at Elsie and smile; then Dapple would give a great bound and get foremost, and Elsie would laugh out loud, for she had never felt anything

so delightful as this before. At last they had come quite to the edge of the grey cloud, so they drew bridle and Elsie looked over down the sky. There was a great windy space, all round her, here and there were more clouds, grey and white, like the one she had crossed; and down, down, at the very bottom of everything, she noticed a dark spot that Moonbeam said was near her home. Up above her were all the stars, that looked stranger and brighter than from her nursery windows; but then, to be sure, it might be the glass between her and them that had spoiled them.

Floating about were yet smaller clouds, quite white, shaped like fringes and tassels and birds' feathers and all sorts of fantastic things; while, climbing here, there, and everywhere, were Moonbeam's sisters in thousands, as she had said. They slid and darted from one star to another, and played hide-and-seek among the clouds, while others passed straight down from the moon; and these were so like her own friend Moonbeam, that Elsie spoke to one of them, and only found out the difference when they bid her look at the various fringes of their cloaks. Many of them

were going down to places not far from Elsie's home, and some were already returning, for they said they were tired, and that it was nearly time to rest themselves.

"You'll be late, Moonbeam," called one as she passed, "better take Little One home again."

"Do you hear, Elsie?" said her friend. "It is time for us to be going."

"Is it?" replied she, very slowly. "I am sorry, it feels so roomy up here."

"You can think about that to-morrow, you know, and when you look at the clouds again, remember what the other side is like ; now come quickly, I feel tired already, and shall have to hasten."

Moonbeam's voice was faint and low, and Elsie saw she looked quite pale.

"What is the matter, and why must you go?"

"The sun will be up soon, and when he kisses the sky, we all go away to sleep. Come, Elsie."

The ponies turned and hurried headlong down to the big field, even faster than they had come up, and as they passed the sycamore tree, the leaves rustled and whispered, "waking time is coming soon."

At the nursery window they stopped, and Moonbeam slipped from her saddle and slid through with Elsie to her bed.

"You'll come again dear, dear Moonbeam, won't you?" asked she.

"Yes, to-morrow night; we've only tried our ponies this time; to-morrow I will show you different things. Good night, and sleep sound;" and Moonbeam kissed her and slid away again, and Elsie pulled the clothes close round her and slept sound till mamma told her it was time to get up.

"Mamma," she cried, "I've been such a ride! I don't want you to get me a pony now, I've got Dapple, and he's gone—well I don't know where he's gone—but he's coming back to-night, and the wrong side, I mean the other side, you know, of the clouds is like the colour of your big white shell!"

"Is it, darling? I'm very glad you have seen it, but now you must come and be dressed, and Farmer Ridley has sent you a fresh brown egg for breakfast."

"One of those nice creamy-brown ones? Oh, mother, make haste, and we'll have breakfast directly, directly."

THE SECOND RIDE.

THE next day seemed dreadfully long. Elsie thought the hands of the big clock would never get round to the hour when she might go to bed; but at last she had had tea, then she had been undressed and tucked into her nest—as mamma called it when she bid her good-night; the lamp was gone, and, delightful to see, Moonbeam's sisters were looking in at the window. A few minutes more, and Moonbeam herself was there with Gleam and Dapple, and Elsie was up and away again with the fresh air blowing on her face.

"Where are you going to-night?" asked she.

"I am going to show you some people that you have never seen; we shall soon be at the place where they live."

"What kind of people are they?"

"Imps!"

"Imps! Dear me; I haven't learnt about them in my lessons yet."

"I daresay not, Elsie, they don't get into lesson books; but then you learn about them now, you see, out of lesson-time. Here we are now over a forest; look how grey and silvery and quiet the tops of the trees are, all hushed up to rest, with the birds asleep among them: now we must slip down here, and we shall find what we want."

Down they went accordingly, and first they passed a rook's nest, where the birds looked like black balls; they were quite high up, and had a fine view when they woke every morning. Then they passed a squirrel who was nearly asleep, but had stayed out late talking to a friend; then they came to a robin's nest, where one young bird cried "cheep, cheep," because another pushed him too near the edge; then they dropped down on to the softest finest grass, not the strong broad kind that grows in the fields, but so delicate, that it is quite fit for a carpet for the fairies, and, as it happens, it grows best under the fir-trees which shade their favourite haunts.

Just in front of her, Elsie saw the mouth of a low-arched cave, looking very black and grim, and running out of it came a lot of tiny men carrying little tables made of toadstools. These they set down near Elsie; and then went back for their supper, which they arranged on the tables very neatly; when this was done, they all walked up to Elsie, and stood looking at her, while she on her part stared at them with wide open eyes. They were certainly very comical, these little fellows; their clothes were very tight, and were almost all of a light brown, while their caps, which were pointed and tipped with little round tassels, were of all sorts of colours. After a pause, while Elsie and they continued to examine each other, one, who was about a quarter of an inch taller than the rest, and had a very wrinkled, funny face, turned round and said very gravely to his companions, "Gentlemen, when I used to go and pay visits, I was taught to say, how do you do? Gentlemen, this lady seems to be paying us a visit." At this all the imps stuck one leg straight out, and whirled round on the other—which was their way of saying yes—and then laughed.

"Oh, indeed, how do you do?" said Elsie, who had discovered she was being talked at.

Instantly they all took off their caps, and bowed in a row, while the tall one replied, "Pretty well, madam, thank you; may we take supper?"

"Dear me, yes," answered Elsie, "at least, I suppose you may, mayn't you?"

"Certainly, by your leave, madam," and with more bows the small people went off and stood round the tables, or sat on the grass, and began to eat with a will, as though they meant to finish all that was provided.

"Will you allow us to offer you some minced rush-pith, or some sorrel salad, madam?" asked the tall imp after a little.

"Thank you, I don't think I will have any," answered Elsie, who was a very polite little girl, and thought it would be a pity for her to take any when the little people were so hungry, for the whole feast did not look as much as her own cup of bread and milk that she ate up every night at home.

Supper over, the imps cleared away their dishes

very fast, and then seizing their toadstools, turned them upside down and sat upon them ; and as they were all covered underneath with scarlet or lilac, they looked very pretty, but did not seem at all comfortable.

“How very odd you are,” exclaimed Elsie, “why in the world don’t you have chairs?”

No sooner had she said this, than all the little men jumped up, tossed their caps into the air, whirled round, and in fact seemed so wild with delight, that Elsie looked about for Moonbeam, as if she were half inclined to ride away.

Moonbeam, however, only laughed and nodded her head, so she thought better of it, and cried : “Do tell me what all this is about !”

“With the utmost pleasure,” said the polite little man who had spoken before, and who now drew near, rising now and then on the very points of his toes, as if to bring himself closer to Elsie’s ears. “You must know,” began he, “that there is an immense, I may say an enormous deal of work done in Fairyland, and that every fairy has a certain quantity allotted as his or her share. We, my dear

madam, were fairies once, but unfortunately found the pleasures of laziness greater than the pleasure of work. Truth to tell, we did nothing, positively nothing, except study how to be comfortable. Naturally, when the king and queen came to visit our part of the country, they were dreadfully shocked; and after holding a council, decided that we should be turned into our present shapes, and set to labour in the caves at the least interesting occupations that fairies have—painting rocks in out-of-the-way corners, and such like. Here we were to remain till we had learnt to see our mistakes, and had got a certain task done. The first we very soon did; the second we have nearly completed, and then we shall return to our old homes.”

“But why were you so pleased when I spoke about the chairs?”

“Because it was part of our sentence that we were only to get back our old comforts through the help of some mortal who might visit us, and be wise enough to speak of any of the articles we required. At first we ate our suppers without tables or dishes, and we found it disagreeable, decidedly. Moonbeam

was very good in bringing people to see us, but you can have no idea," continued the imp, very solemnly, "of their excessive stupidity. One little girl in particular I remember. We came close to her, so that she might see how very difficult it was to manage our meals, but she merely stared and said, 'What nasty stuff you eat!' Moonbeam of course hurried her away after such rudeness, and soon after brought a little boy to visit us. He had better sense, for the moment he remarked how the strawberry sauce ran out of the leaves we carried it in, he called out, 'Where are your dishes?' and when we stood in front of him, with our suppers in our hands, he burst out laughing, and said, 'Stupids! why don't you get tables?' Now that you have provided us with chairs we shall be comparatively comfortable till the end of our stay here. Pray receive our thanks."

At this all the imps whirled round twice, and then took hold of the tassels on the tops of their caps and slowly pulled their heads down, so as nearly to touch their toes, which made Elsie think of the bed of scarlet, white, and purple anemones in her

garden, when the wind blew over them. Moonbeam then came forward, and laying her hand on her shoulder, told her it was time for them to be off again, and that she must bid the imps good night. Elsie accordingly said, "Good night, little imps, I'm so glad I came. Will you shake hands?"

"Delighted, if you will lay your hand on the grass."

No sooner had Elsie done so, than she felt as if a thousand flies had settled on her fingers, while a thousand tiny voices cried cheerily, "Good night, little lady, good night," and when she rose to her feet the whole of her new friends had disappeared, tables and all, and only Gleam and Dapple were beside her, eager to be gone.

"Where to, now, Moonbeam?"

"Anywhere you like, Elsie."

"Into some wide place, then, if you please."

"Very well," replied Moonbeam, with a shake of her reins, that made Gleam speed up and up and far away, with the grey pony close behind. First they passed above a beautiful broad lake, and at one end of it was a great bed of water lilies.

In each blossom sat a fairy with a pair of silver oars, and as the lily stalks were long, they rowed about talking and sometimes singing to each other, so that an old willow that grew close by shook his hoary hair and whispered softly, " Sweet songs, sweet songs ! " Now this was the song Elsie liked best.

Under the willow-boughs, under the fern,
Lulled by the murmuring croon of the burn,
Through the warm light of the long summer days,
Hid in the lily-buds, dream the white fays.

But when the stars shine out o'er the dim lake,
We in our leaf-hidden coverts awake,
And thread the dark shadows, as, wafted afar,
Each in her silver barge gleams like a star.

Each in her state, like a queen on her throne,
Low to her golden lute singing alone—
A weird song of wonder, of love and delight,
Filled with the rapturous hush of the night.

The sad owl is silent, the grey moth flits near,
The young moon steals forth from her cavern to hear ;
Then stay with us, little one ; list to our lays,
And we'll crown thee fair queen of the white lily fays !

For a moment Elsie thought this a most charming offer, but only for a moment, for it occurred to her

almost immediately that were she to accept it she must of course live like her subjects, with whom the condition of wet feet appeared to be chronic, and who had apparently no mammas to make them that delicious hot treacle-posset that caused her to think a cold rather pleasant than otherwise, as long as that particular remedy was forthcoming. She did not feel sorry, therefore, when Moonbeam hurried her away, past the mouth of a shallow river, where she could hear the water-sprites laughing as they clattered over the stones on their way to an evening party on the lake.

“We are going to the place where this water comes from,” said Moonbeam, and the ponies tore along between the thick trees that clothed either bank of the hurrying stream. Elsie felt as if she did not know how to remember enough of what she saw in their progress; dark brown pools where the fishes lay hid; shimmering bits of shallow; then steep rocks with waterfalls, where the pixies flung themselves merrily down, their long hair floating upwards behind them; then an open space, where a smaller river joined the one they were following,

and the two kissed each other softly beneath the shadow of the long ferns.

"Is this the end of our river, Moonbeam?" asked Elsie.

"Oh no; look up over your head."

Elsie looked up and had only time to draw a long breath before, with a snort, Gleam and Dapple were off, as though they thought the greatest possible fun was a race uphill. It *was* a hill that towered above them, and the higher they rode the barer it grew. Elsie hardly knew which went quickest, the stream, a small one now, leaping with a shout down the rocks, or she leaping and bounding upwards. It was glorious, brushing over the dewy bloom of the heather, sweeping silvery drops off the tossing birches, laughing to the water that laughed back to her, and feeling the air become fresher and clearer as they rose! Soon, however, the stream grew quieter, and it seemed that Moonbeam, too, was stiller, so that Elsie herself ceased to laugh. They were close to the top of the hill now,—a long stretch of grey waving grass, with here and there deep swamps and rushes.

"This is one of our wide places, Elsie," said Moonbeam, softly; "listen and you will hear the whisper of the waters, gathering among the rushes to go out to the world below the hills."

Pausing to hearken, Elsie heard tender voices chanting the

SONG OF THE WATER DROPS.

Drip, drop, we come, we go,
With patient footsteps, soft and slow;
Where the wildest breezes blow,
Where the greenest rushes grow,
Where the asphodel's a-blow,
Gathering, whispering, to and fro,
Drip, drop, we come and go.

Where the Storm his face unveils,
Where the wide-winged eagle sails,
'Mid the mystery of the hills
Marshalling the golden rills,
While the bent waves, to and fro,
Drip, drop, we come, we go.

Below our mist enwreathen shroud,—
The sunlit crag—the brooding cloud,—
Across the hill's empurpled side
Strange voices cry, "The world is wide;"
And gathering, hearkening, to and fro,
Drip, drop, we come, we go.

Drip, drop, she heard them rustling and sliding gently together; murmuring softly in slow words of the life that was to begin for them so soon, when they would leave their birthplace and wander away towards the sea; and the wind blew low over the bent, and Elsie, as she listened, laid her head down on Dapple's neck and felt, she knew not why, as though her mother were hushing her to sleep.

"Wake, Elsie, dear," said her companion; "we must go home now, and I cannot come again for you to-morrow."

"Oh, Moonbeam! not to-morrow; what shall I do without you?"

"I will ask the beautiful West Wind to take you out with him, my child. Will you like that?"

"Yes, I think so, since you cannot come. But surely you can take me some other night?"

"I will see you again, dear. To those who have ridden with me once I often return for a passing word and smile. Now go to sleep here in my arms, and I will carry you home."

Elsie was so sleepy she said nothing more, but

held out her hands to Moonbeam, who took her into her lap, and when she next awoke she was safe in her own bed, and the birds were already singing good morning in her garden.

THE THIRD RIDE.

"LITTLE ELSIE, come away, come away," sang the West Wind from the top of the sycamore, and so sweet and yet so strong was his voice that Elsie heard it in her sleep and got up to obey. The window appeared to open of itself, and as soon as she had stepped out into the night a beautiful being lighted down in front of her.

At first he seemed to be surrounded by a golden haze, but when he spoke again and said, "Good evening, Little One," her eyes grew clearer, and she could see him plainly in the moonlight. Beside her was a strong-chested white horse, with a broad forehead and great bright eyes like the evening star, and on his back sat the Wind in glistening apparel, looking so tall and noble that Elsie felt frightened, until he bent down to her and smiled, and then she understood why his voice must needs be sweet as well as strong.

"You are coming with me to-night, Little One, so wrap yourself in this downy cloak and I will lift you up behind me; we travel very fast, you know; much faster than Moonbeam's ponies, so you must hold very firmly by my girdle."

"Do we really; and don't you get tired?"

"No; we are the fleetest travellers in the world, we Winds, except, perhaps, two or three."

"And where do you mean to take me," enquired Elsie, as she settled herself comfortably on the white charger's croup, and took hold of her new companion's glittering belt, to which there hung a silver horn.

"Moonbeam tells me you like wide places," answered he. "Have you ever seen the sea?"

"Once, when I was very little indeed, and then it was a long way off. Oh, do take me out there and show me the ships!"

"So I will, Little One; now here we go."

West Wind patted his horse's neck once and whispered in his ear, and upward he sprang into the sky, with great strides, each of which seemed to cover a mile. Towns, farmsteads, woods, and

lakes seemed to be flying past them far below, while just in front hurried streaming silvery clouds that the horse's breath tossed and tumbled as they whirled along.

At first Elsie could hardly breathe, they were going so fast, and when she looked down and saw at what a pace they were flying above the earth, she shut her eyes and held on tighter than ever.

"Why, Little One, are you frightened?" said the Wind, in a voice just as soft as when he first spoke. "See, I will do something to prevent you looking too far below."

With this he stretched out his hand and caught one of the flying white clouds, and tossed it behind him, where it wound and clung round Elsie, so that she felt quite wrapped up, and did not mind a bit when West Wind said laughingly—

"We shall go faster yet ere we get home."

On, on they galloped with the same long, even bounds, the great horse going as easily as though nothing would ever weary him, his bridle, that was of pale amethyst, hanging loose on his outstretched

neck. When Elsie had grown accustomed to the motion, and could look about her, she felt that the cloud was gently letting her go, and melting away above her head, where the sky was growing rosy and light.

"Why, it looks like morning, Wind!" she cried.

"Yes, I have carried you so far that we shall soon overtake the sun, and get back into the daylight, and in a minute more we shall see the sea."

Even as he spoke something appeared below them, like the blue grey of a shell; then the colour changed to the pale white of a pearl; then to the rose of a blush-rose leaf, the gold of an opal, the sparkling shining blue of a summer dawn,—and there was the glorious sea, with the clash and song of the waves rising joyously up in the morning.

"Oh, how very, very, very beautiful!" exclaimed Elsie, whose face was rosy too in the growing light.

"So it is, Little One; and we are going right down into it, to feel how fresh and cool it is."

So saying, the white horse swooped down till he

seemed to be flying along the crests of the waves ; and as the Wind brushed his fingers over them, they broke into the sunniest, brightest laugh, and threw crisp, white showers of spray into his face while he smiled down upon them.

"Are there no ships?" asked Elsie, after they had gone on thus for some time.

"Let us go up and look," was the reply, and up went the steed once more into the rosy air. Then West Wind looked all round till he saw far off a dark speck that he knew was a ship. "We will go and see what she looks like, and whether she wants a puff of air to help her," said he gathering up the purple reins, so that the horse shortened his stride as they reached the vessel, and seemed to float gently just above her shining spars, letting the riders see and hear all that was going on on the crowded deck. She was a very large ship, and was full of people, who had come a weary way and were longing sorely for home.

"Ah," said one, a war-worn soldier with a wounded arm, "if there were but a wind to help us!"

"If there were only a breath of air to cool us,"

sighed another passenger, a young mother with a sick child in her arms.

"We should soon see home but for this hot still weather," went on a third, and so it was with all on board. West Wind smiled and first he breathed gently on the child's face, so that he looked up and said how nice the air felt, then he went away to a little distance and rode down again on to the water. When he was behind the ship he lifted his horn to his lips and blew a low sweet note, and at once the waves began to rise higher and curl with foam. Then Elsie saw that there was a great stir on deck ; people talking eagerly one to another, and blue-jacketed sailors hurrying backwards and forwards, shaking out the great white sails that filled and stretched with the strong breath of the Wind, so that the ship laid her side to the sea and cut her way swiftly through the water that hissed and bubbled around her, while the Wind, shaking his reins and blowing his silver horn, urged on his steed faster and faster behind. How the pale tired faces brightened as they felt the growing speed ; it was as if a fresh sunshine had touched them, and West Wind, delight-

ing in the pleasure he gave, leant forward, keeping pace with the vessel, while the feet of the white horse tossed the foam about, to the joy of the children, who shrieked and clapped their hands with delight as they looked down over the side.

"See! see the big fish!" shouted one as he clambered higher, and as he spoke, Elsie heard a rush behind her, and turning to look, saw a shoal of huge porpoises, who seemed to be trying a race with the ship and the wind. On they came, the great beautiful creatures, their sides glistening pink and silver in the light; now shooting out from the crest of a wave and diving headlong into the green hollow below; now turning and rolling as though to feel the wash of the water; now springing right up as if determined to reach the very deck. And the Wind on his strong steed bounded along beside them, while the sea sang triumphantly in the sunlight, and Elsie thought she had never in her life seen anything so joyous and gay. At last the Wind drew his bridle tighter, and told her it was time for them to go home; and though his little companion was sorry to lose sight of the good ship that was winging her homeward

way so gloriously, she remembered that her mamma would be looking for her, and felt glad to go. Once more they rose into the upper air; away in front of them they could see a faint gleam of light shining through a soft warm haze, and]that, the Wind told her, was the shore to which the vessel they had left was bound.

As they drew nearer, Elsie saw that the pale line was a beautiful white cliff, on whose top the grass grew soft and green, while the long-winged sea birds swooped around, or settled on its sides.

Then they passed a lonely tower, where a great lamp burnt at night, to show the vessels that were coming in how to avoid the rocks. And as they flew by, a man looked up from the tower and cried, "A bonny Wind for the homeward bound, God keep them!" And somehow Elsie knew that the woman with the sick child was his sister, and that the happy Wind was bearing her to him.

Next they passed some cottages, and at the door of one stood a girl shading her eyes with her hand, and gazing eagerly out to sea, as she murmured to herself, "Surely, surely, they'll be in to-day!" and

she, too, was looking for the ship. On they sped again, over fields where the young grain bent before them, and the flowers shook the dew from their leaves; on over the farm-yards, where the cocks began to smooth their feathers and call to the birds to wake, till at last they drew near Elsie's home.

"You will come again to-morrow for me, dear Wind, will you not?" asked she.

"No, Little One, not to-morrow. I have a very different journey to take, and one that you would not like."

As he spoke, his sweet voice grew deeper, and Elsie looking up, saw that his face was stern and sad.

"Tell me what it is, and why you are grave about it."

"To-morrow night I go on a dark path, among gloomy clouds; I pass over a town where there are sorrowful sights, and I carry thence to the sea things that must be buried in the clean water. I take no children out to-morrow, but you shall see me often in the evening, Little One, though you cannot ride with me again."

"Where am I to look for you then?"

"When the sun is going to bed, and you yourself are ready to sleep, look up out of the window, and you will see me moving among the purple and gold clouds, and when they fly past you, you will know that it is I who am shaking my purple reins, and sounding my silver horn."

"But am I to have no more rides at all? Oh, I shall want so very much to come!"

"Will you, Elsie? Well, I will give you something else to ride, and you shall hear about it now."

So saying, the Wind dropped down by a great house, which Elsie saw was the one that belonged to Lord Netley.

They lit upon a broad stone balcony, and peeped in at a window where the curtains were half drawn aside, and this is what they saw :—a pleasant-faced nurse coming into a room, and calling to a little girl to wake. As she spoke, Lady Emily, for she it was, sat up in bed, and shaking back the bright hair Elsie had admired, exclaimed in the clearest and merriest of voices, "Nursie, dear, I've had a dream, and I've made up my mind."

"Have you, and what is it about?"

"I dreamt that I was riding with that little girl that I saw in the field the other day, and I'm going to ask mamma to let me see her."

"Oh, how nice!" cried Elsie, leaning against the window, but the Wind whispered to her to be quiet.

"How the Wind blows, Nursie!" said Emily, looking at the window.

"Yes, it's a windy morning; but about this little girl, I don't think she has a pony, so how can she go out with you?"

"She can ride Alice's, to be sure."

"Oh, Emy!" said another voice, and a second little girl popped a rosy face over the side of a crib in the corner; "nobody mustn't ride my pony, or what am I to do myself? You always roded your own before, and now you want mine too!"

"No I don't, Ally, but you know you are not big enough to take long rides with me; you only sit in a Spanish saddle and are led quietly, so when you have roded enough, as you call it, I want some one else to have your pony and come for a good canter."

‘Well, my dears,’ said Nurse, ‘we shall see what your mamma says about it, but now you must get up.’

Wind carried Elsie away from the balcony just then, reminding her that she must hurry into bed, or her mamma would wonder what had become of her.

It seemed to her that only a minute had passed before she was comfortably wrapped up in her own little bed again, and that in another five her mamma’s voice awoke her.

‘Mamma! Lady Emily is going to bring me a pony.’

‘Is she, Elsie? you have been dreaming and sleeping so sound I could not wake you; make haste now and get dressed.’

Elsie waited and watched all the morning, and true enough, at last she heard a sound, and there appeared not the little rider, but a carriage, in which the two children were sitting with their mamma. It drove up the road to the door, and very soon Elsie was called in to see her visitors. She felt as if she knew all about them already, so that they were fast

friends in a few minutes, and Alice was quite glad that Elsie should ride her pony. He was a fat brown Sheltie, and with Emily beside her, Elsie did ride him, and enjoyed herself very much many and many a time; but still she often thought that no rides were so wonderful or so pleasant as those that she took with Moonbeam and the beautiful West Wind.

A CHRISTMAS PARTY.

“GOOD-EVENING to you all! Now we are met again, let us be jolly!”

Whoever was not jolly within hearing of that voice, must have been a perfect curmudgeon, for it was the cheeriest, merriest voice that ever desired people to enjoy themselves. It was Old Father Christmas who spoke, standing in his winter drawing-room to receive a party of friends, and a splendid room it was. The roof was deep blue, the walls were bright with holly and mistletoe, and the fireplace had a whole tree in it, burning away as if everything depended on the fire alone. Christmas himself wore a dress of flame colour, and over it a robe of white, worked round the edges with green, while in his hand he carried a staff, on the top of which was a knob strongly resembling a plum

pudding when it is borne in to dinner wrapped in blue flame.

The old gentleman's face was like his voice, enough to make your heart glow again, if you glanced at him once; but though the face was round and rosy and merry, the eyes were quite different, and might almost have belonged to someone else. They were clear and searching, looking right through and through you, and so bright that Midsummer's Night declared with a shake of her pretty head, that she was sure Christmas had stolen two of her nicest stars, and was wearing them as eyes. She came into the room laughing at the cold, and as she threw aside her cloak and spread out her spangled dress with a shrug of her pretty shoulders, Valentine's Day expressed his surprise that she could keep herself alive at all, even with such a fire in sight. He was dressed in a wonderful garment, all over Cupid's heads and roses and lace, and minced along with a ridiculous step and Malvolio air, that were in themselves a joke. After him came two curious figures; one was a grey-bearded man, in a monk's brown cloak and hood, fringed round

with something that looked like drops of rain ; the other was an old, old woman, whose clothes were made like a peasant's, only of beautifully fine stuff. She wore a soft brown petticoat with a little shawl pinned across her shoulders ; over this was an immense blue cloak as long as her neighbour's, but much more convenient, and on her head was a large white cap, from under the deep frill of which twinkled a face quieter, though as hearty as that of Christmas himself. It was a wonderful face, all over wrinkles, in each of which some humorous notion seemed lurking, while every sentence she uttered melted into a low chuckle of merriment.

"Thrice welcome, Dame Hallowe'en," exclaimed Christmas as she entered. "Why, the sight of your face makes one laugh. Have you a tale for us to-night?"

"'Deed have I, ye're no blate to speir."

"Oh! oh!" cried all the listeners, "you're quite incorrigible, mother, with your queer language. Didn't you promise to bring your English with you next time you came into polite society?"

"Yes, indeed! the idea of *my* mingling with that

sort of company!" exclaimed a remarkably pert looking boy who had just entered, and who immediately executed a somersault which brought him to the dame's side.

"Weel, weel, laddie, ye're none the nearer sense since we last met. But I must keep my word and suit myself to my company, though my tongue ettles at—I mean wants to try—my ain pawky Scotch—I mean—well, if any of you can put *pawky* into English, I give them leave, for it's clean beyond me."

Nobody could answer the challenge, so the dame had the best of it, as she took her seat by the fire, and just then a scent of violets filled the air, and in floated May Day, clad in white, and wreathed all over with hawthorn flowers. Behind her came a stately old man, the chief peculiarity of whose dress was a collar of grey goose feathers round his throat; closely followed by a boy wearing a parti-coloured costume fringed with small silver fish, and who strongly resembled Twelfth Night in features, though he lacked the cleverness that characterised the face of that promising youngster.

These two, like the rest, saluted Christmas, and then passed up the room to pay their respects to a very old man, who sat calm and immoveable on a silver throne, surveying, however, with a kindly glance, each guest that entered. This was the Year whose life was nearly over, and who received the greeting of his friends with the serene quiet of a king whose work is done. When all were assembled, Christmas gave the signal for supper, and a right jovial feast it was. Invisible attendants brought the dishes and ministered to the wants of the guests, and never was monarch's table more deftly or daintily served. Supper over, Christmas rose, and with a smile that had got somehow into his very voice, began to speak:—

“Now for our ancient and honourable custom. Friends, let us drink to the health of those we mean to honour with our special care and goodwill; I give the first toast: it is ‘Kind hearts and open hands!’”

There was a peculiarity in this custom, for directly a toast was proposed, hundreds of attendant fairies in waiting flew forth to carry some evidence of its

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heartiness to those whom it concerned, and as, thank Heaven! there are many kind hearts and open hands in the world, the little sprites had, on this occasion, enough to do in conveying the message of Father Christmas.

"Now Old Year, it is your turn," said the host.

"Ah, my children," replied he, "there is a toast I always give, though it is hardly so gay as some of yours': 'I drink the health of the old friends that are going, and the new ones that are to come!'"

Everyone looked grave over this, for they all knew that the good Old Year was thinking of his own speedy departure; but, after a moment's pause, Michaelmas got up and said, "I think I can give you a better toast than that: I give 'The one friend that, as long as we live, never fails us, but only changes his form; and when he is weary, goes away one moment to come back the next, still fresh and fair, the good constant Year!'"

Heartily they all cheered this toast, and the old man himself smiled softly as the fairies showered their precious dew upon his head.

Valentine spoke next, with a bow to Dame Hallowe'en, who sat opposite—

“Out of compliment to my opposite neighbour, I choose a Scotch toast: ‘Honest men and bonny lasses!’”

“Valentine, I’m surprised at ye!” quoth the dame calmly, “for three reasons: firstly, it’s no compliment to me that am past my beauty days; secondly, you should have more pity on the ‘good people’ in attendance, than to give them such a deal of work, for everybody knows I’m the exception that proves the rule of pretty faces; and thirdly, oh, Valentine my man, how could you propose ‘honest men,’ when you yourself are the greatest humbug living?”

A shout of laughter, at Valentine’s expense, all but drowned his meek reply, that he thought in both cases there was the attraction of opposites, and for a while no one seemed to have anything more to propose; then Twelfth Night, the boy who had spoken before, pertly addressed Father Christmas: “I presume I mayn’t wish anything malicious, may I?”

“Certainly, if you like; only there’s a condition,” was the sly rejoinder.

"What is that?"

"That if anyone wishes an ill wish, the fairies carry it out on him who has wished it."

"Oh, dear! I'm so glad I didn't speak sooner. I suppose then I must moderate my aspirations and only drink 'More patience to schoolmasters!'"

"I think that is wiser, my son; had you wished them anything worse, we might have missed you from our party. But how wags the world with you?"

"Badly, very badly," sighed Twelfth Night. "You have no idea how people have changed of late years, and I am sorry to say they neglect old customs, and take up new-fangled ways, so that I positively believe I shall hardly have a cake this season."

"That's dreadful!" remarked Valentine, who had a great taste for sweets. "How has that come to pass? and why are you indignant with schoolmasters?"

"One question at a time, friend; I'll answer the last first, as it is, so to speak, the key of the position. Schoolmasters in the good old days used to acknowledge me, and make friends with me, to the great

comfort of all concerned; they would as soon have thought of neglecting Christmas himself, as me; and I assure you things were all the better managed, for the fun that finished the holidays was a sort of escape for a good deal of mischief that peeps out now during the half. And as for cakes, why bless you, there used to be constables at the confectioner's doors to clear the way for the shopmen carrying their loads to the houses round; those were days indeed!"

"They must have been worth living in," rejoined Valentine, with a regretful sigh.

"I should think so, for besides the enormous quantity of cakes that were consumed, there were regular games in my honour; people chose different characters, and kept them up with all the bravery of dress they could muster; but you scarcely ever see that kind of thing now. Ah! I remember the day when Will Jenkin and Mrs. Susan Bolton made up a quarrel, all thanks to me!"

"And who might they be?" asked more than one of the guests.

"Susan Bolton was counted the prettiest girl in

Barton-in-the-Fields, for her cheeks were like rosy apples, and her hair and eyes like a ripe chestnut ; Will Jenkin was as handsome in his way, and had besides a bolder air than any other apprentice in the town, and in those days the apprentices thought a good deal of themselves, and could use their cudgels if other people failed to agree with them. Both Susan and Will were a thought quick in the temper, and the one could not bear to hear that anyone was better dressed or more admired than she, while the other would grow as red as a turkey-cock's wattle, if anyone indulged in a joke at his expense, quite forgetting that his own anger added point to the jest. One would have thought such hot spirits would have found their hands full enough without adding love-making to their other occupations ; but I suppose like will to like, and so it was soon said in the town that the handsome apprentice and the pretty waiting-maid would be married some day. Meantime, it was lucky for them that they served respectively a kind master and mistress, for if they had given trouble enough before, they gave ten times more now. And no wonder, Susan would

have said, considering that with her own eyes she had seen Jenkin leave the shop opposite to carry a message from his master, Clarke, the watchmaker, to Neighbour Humble, and not a moment had he spared to look in on her, though she lived just across the road. It was all nonsense' to say that he couldn't waste his master's time; no doubt he found time enough to look at pretty Mistress Humble's new head-gear; and to this Jenkin could find no answer, for pride forbade him to confess that that lady would not have condescended even to speak to one whose own head-gear was nothing nobler than a prentice's cap. He could turn the tables on Susan, at times, however, and it must be owned, never missed his opportunity of doing so. Her mistress, Dame Morlake, had an only son, who followed his dead father's profession of a sailor, and now and again would send home a parcel of pretty things for his mother from the strange places he visited in his wanderings. The messenger on these occasions was usually a certain tall seaman; and when his visit was over, Jenkin, with his cap more on one side, and his head higher than usual, would swagger

across to the dame's house and quarrel with pretty Susan for the welcome she had given to the stranger. Nothing would go straight in either house after that, and it tried the watchmaker's patience sorely to find some unexpected bit of work left for his own hands to do; while nothing but the sight of her son's gift would comfort the poor old Dame when her nightly posset was badly mixed, and was brought to her, moreover, by a melancholy damsel, whose red eyes, doleful air, and tearful voice, were quite unlike the bright aspect of her attendant on happier days. There was no help for it, however, for, as we all know, it is easy to fill an empty head with everything except sense, and what was more, these two jealous souls could not even be married and left to manage their own affairs, for Jenkin had to serve out his time, and then to find an opening to set up for himself; and Susan had not saved enough money to begin housekeeping as yet. How long, therefore, they would have gone on tormenting themselves and others I cannot say, had not I undertaken to make peace between them, and I think you'll allow that was a very pretty piece of

work for a boy like me. Christmas had come, and young Morlake had come into port after a fortunate voyage, and only waited to settle his affairs there before hurrying home. Not to delay his mother's happiness, he sent a messenger to tell her that he would be with her by Twelfth Night, for you must remember that at the time I mean there were no penny stamps, and a letter would have been a very slow and uncertain way of sending the news. It was a bright frosty morning when Ned Coombe, the tall sailor, reached Barton-in-the-Fields, and though he had sailed across distant seas, and seen many wonderful sights, he thought none of them had been as pleasant as the homely little street, with its overhanging gables, and open shop fronts decked with holly and mistletoe. Ned was dusty and weary, for no sailor likes walking anything longer than a deck, and he had had a difficult journey; but nevertheless, as he passed the doors where his old acquaintances were loitering, he had a smile and a merry greeting for each, and a jest too, when they asked him what was in the big bundle he carried over his shoulder. He was such a general

favourite, that Jenkin must have heard soon enough of his arrival even had he not wished him, in passing, a laughing good-day, and enquired if there was any message for pretty Susan. It was she who opened the house door to his knock, and led him into the front parlour with the low old-fashioned windows, and the jealous Jenkin must needs draw near to watch their proceedings. What he saw by no means improved his temper, for there was Ned, drinking ale out of the very tankard he himself always used, while Susan, with a smiling face, tried to undo the hard knotted rope that secured the precious bundle. Of course the sailor helped her—what else indeed could he do?—but it was unlucky that the watcher outside could not hear as well as see what passed next.

“‘There,’ said Ned, placing a large parcel in Susan’s hands, ‘take that brocade to your mistress, and tell her the captain will be here himself, before Twelfth Night comes round.’

“‘Why, that’s the very best news I’ve heard for many a day,’ exclaimed Susan, ‘my mistress is so weary of wishing for her son, that it is

high time indeed for Master Henry to come home!’

“‘I am glad my news pleases you,’ replied Ned, who was on his knees fumbling at his bundle, ‘but in case you should think yourself forgotten, here’s an Indian scarf that ought to be smarter than any you’ll see hereabouts.’

“And so saying, he held out a beautiful bit of embroidery the like of which the poor apprentice could never have given, though he had ransacked every shop in the town. How Susan smiled and blushed, and dropped her parcel in her haste to shake the giver by the hands, and with what a pleased face she at last went away on her errand he also saw; and no sooner had the door closed on her, than he tapped smartly at the window, and, half choked with rage, huskily desired the intruder to come out and speak with him. Instead of doing so, however, Ned opened the window and leant out, and his very attitude, as he crossed his arms on the broad sill, showed how little chance Jenkin had of provoking him. Did you ever watch the efforts of a small dog to rouse a

good-natured Newfoundland? If you have, you will know exactly how these two looked. Nor did Jenkin fare better at Susan's hands, for she told him roundly, he had no right to play the spy; and when at last they parted, the lovers vowed never, no never, to speak to each other again. Poor Dame Morlake would have had a hard time of it with her maid, had not their minds been so much occupied with preparations for Twelfth Night, that they could not speak or think of anything else. Such a baking of cakes and pastry, such a cooking of pies and force-meat, had not gone on in the house since the Dame had been a bride; and then Ned helped so cleverly, that the work seemed to be done in half the time they expected. Who but he bought the finest apples, and knew just the right kind for roasting in ale? who but he mounted the ladder, and fastened green wreaths in high corners that no one else could reach? and who but he filled the curious china vases on the mantelpiece with holly, so richly loaded with berries, that the whole wall seemed to blaze with red? He carried the invitations, too, so cheerily, that it was no wonder everyone accepted them with a

good will, and it was only likely that in all this bustle, and with such a pleasant companion at her elbow, Susan did not waste many thoughts on the sulky apprentice over the way. When it wanted but two days to the longed-for time of the feast, the young captain arrived, and, as heretofore, took the hearts of the Barton folk quite by storm. His sunburnt face, frank smile, and jolly voice, seemed to make the Christmas gaieties more gay; and old Clarke declared, rubbing his hands as he spoke, that the very fire in the chimney had burnt with a quicker flame, when his hearty greeting made the rafters ring again. Long and loudly did that jovial laugh resound, when, in answer to his questions, Dame Morlake told him of the disturbance that had ended in the disgrace of Jenkin, and not long after, he and Ned were seen whispering in a corner, with bursts of suppressed merriment that showed there was mischief brewing. You must not suppose that the great pride of the feast, my especial cake, had been trusted to Susan's inexperienced hands: only the best confectioners could supply a Twelfth Night cake, and you modern people have no idea what a

cake it was. If Valentine there had only seen it, he would never have been able to dream of anything else for the rest of his life. In each cake the baker put a bean or a pea, and whoever found it in their slice became king or queen of the night, and ruled all the rest of the company. Now Mrs. Morlake had made up her mind that Harry should settle down at home with a wife, and that no one would suit him so well as Nelly Clarke, the watchmaker's pretty daughter, who had plenty of good sense in her head, and money in her pocket into the bargain. Nelly, therefore, and no one else, she said, must be Queen on Twelfth Night; and in order to manage this to her satisfaction, she took Susan into her councils. Bidding her be very discreet and silent to everyone else, she told her to go to Master Dulcet, the great confectioner, and tell him to put only one bean into her cake, and to make a little notch at the place where it would be.

“‘But how then,’ asked Susan, ‘are we to give that piece to Miss Nelly? someone else might take it, knowing nothing about it.’

“‘Nonsense child, it's easy to manage such a

trifle as that; I will divide my cake myself, after the good old fashion, and we can easily teach little Rose Clarke to play the part and call her sister's name first.'

"Away went Susan; but somehow, from thinking over Master Harry's prospects, she fell to reflecting about her own, and about how cruel it seemed that Jenkin should be absent from their party. So thinking, she slackened her pace as she came home past the watchmaker's door, and gazed earnestly into the shop. Not a glance did she get in return from the industrious young workman who appeared to be quite absorbed in the work over which he was stooping, glass in eye; and as the disappointed damsel turned sharply away, she could not guess that he not only had seen her approach, but that he detected her putting her apron to her eyes before she had quite closed the Dame's heavy door. At last my evening came and everything in the house was ready; the board was loaded with good things, the fiddler was in his place fully prepared to do his duty, Dame Morlake had put on her stiffest brocade, and Susan had wound the Indian

scarf coquettishly about her; only one thing was wanting, and that was the cake. Twice, three times had Dulcet's men passed the windows, staggering under their carefully covered loads, but no knock had sounded on the door except from one or two of the earlier guests, to whom the Dame in despair confided her fears.

"'Dulcet has so many orders our cake may have gone astray.'

"'Yes, that it may, for he bakes for the whole town. Send and see!'

"'Harry!' cried his mother anxiously, 'do you go to Dulcet and see what keeps him.'

"'What keeps him, indeed! I believe the fellow has put our cake in the window for all the town to stare at, and we shall be lucky if we get it to-morrow!'

"A perfect chorus of lamentations rose up at this news, and even Miss Nelly begged the young captain to go and tell the confectioner their opinion, but he with a bow said he could not tear himself away, and that Susan must go instead. 'And look you, Susan,' he said,

‘make sure that the cake is in the window, that I may be able to lecture Dulcet enough to-morrow for his carelessness. You’ll know ours easily, for it is the largest of all and was to have a ship in tinsel on the top.’ The waiting-maid was not a little flustered at this new errand, but she hurried away, saying it was a shame of Dulcet, and that she would not be long in coming back with the cake. Round that odorous door and window a large crowd was collected, partly of people waiting for their goods, partly of those who, being too poor to buy cakes of their own, lingered to look at those of their richer neighbours, and partly of boys who being allowed to run riot on my day, went about with hammers, nails, and pins, and by fastening unwary folk to each other or to the walls, enjoyed what they considered great fun. I don’t defend them, friends, I assure you, being well aware that it was a barbarous custom ; but all the same it was very amusing, at least to those who looked on. Well, Susan hardly thought of these little wretches as she pushed her way to the window and looked vainly for the tinsel ship ; nothing of the sort was

to be seen, and she was going on into the shop when the sharp blow of a hammer resounded, and at the cry of 'Caught, mistress caught!' she found her dress firmly fastened on one side to the oaken doorpost and on the other to the coat of Jenkin himself, who turning hastily round, remained speechless with surprise at his unexpected propinquity to the fair object of his jealous wrath.

"'You here, mistress!' he exclaimed at last, 'why then this has been a good joke,' and in spite of himself he began to laugh.

"'It's no joke to me,' retorted Susan; 'I came here to look for our cake that Master Henry said was in the window, and here I am fast to the wall, and what's more, to you, and the Dame waiting for me and the cake!' And overcome by her troubles she began to cry. 'Come, come, Susan,' said Jenkin, 'we have both been cheated, for Master Henry brought me here saying there was something in the window would please my eyes. Now there's nothing but spiceries that I don't care a farthing for, so he must have meant you; and as for the cake, it went home an hour ago, for he told me so himself.'

“‘Then what did he send me for, for he said nothing about my finding anything to please *me*,’ answered Susan, beginning to dry her tears, while a smile dimpled her cheek.

“‘Well, truly, I think he meant us to make up our quarrel here, and if you’ll give me a kind word, Susan, I don’t care if I stay here an hour.’

“‘You havn’t been very liberal in kind words yourself lately, Master Jenkin.’

“‘I was jealous, Susan, and that makes a fool of almost any man ; but I have never had any peace since we parted.’

“‘Indeed! You were not so anxious to speak to me yesterday. Was the work very fine that you were doing when I passed?’

“‘Now Susan, do you think I didn’t know you were there, and would not have spoken to you if I had felt sure of how you’d like it. Besides, if you will have the whole truth, it was Master Henry that cleared my eyes to-day of cobwebs that I doubt me were of my own spinning.’

“‘Master Henry! If you can’t sweep away such cobwebs without his help they had best remain.

Master Dulcet, Master Dulcet, do come and take out this nail ; I don't want to tear my purple gown, and the Dame must be wanting me for all sorts of things.'

" 'But, Susan, do listen, and don't be so hasty ! You wouldn't have had me keep it a secret from you that Master Henry had spoken, would you ? If you would, you must be very much changed since we last met.'

"Now this being an old ground of quarrel, Jenkin knew he had the best of the argument, and Susan was obliged to stop and answer with a confused look on her face.

" 'I didn't tell you to gossip about our concerns with one who calls us quarrelsome fools, and that's what I heard Master Henry say when the Dame told him I had forgotten to gather fresh lavender for the cupboards because I was thinking of you.'

" 'Did he really ! Do you know I think he was not far wrong ; and since you talk of *our* concerns, there's not so much amiss, after all. Come Susan, let us be friends and I'll see to that nail that you

can't pull out. We'll go together to the Dame's, and she can't blame your absence, since it was her son's doing.'

" 'Well, if it must be so, I must make the best of it,' answered the damsel, whose face showed that she was not ill pleased with the result of the captain's joke; and so, the new skirt safely extricated, the pair went homewards, sometimes mending their pace when they thought of the party, and again lingering to talk over their own affairs. Meantime Mistress Morlake had been let into the secret of her maid's prolonged absence, and had been shown the cake deftly hidden under a snowy napkin. Her mind at ease on this point, she was able to attend to her guests, and seconded by her son, she arranged them with due regard to their rank round the table, where they did ample justice to her good cookery. The meal over, the ceremony of cutting the cake began, and for this purpose it was placed on a small table covered with the best damask, the spotless folds of which made a sufficient screen to hide little Rose, whose business it was to allot the slices without seeing the company. Carefully cutting the piece

on which she alone knew that the notch had been made, the Dame held it up and began :—

“‘Now friends, we shall see who will have the honour of being King and Queen of the evening. Tell us, Rose, for whom shall this slice be?’

“‘For my pretty sister Nell,’ answered the child.

“‘Fie, Rose, fie,’ said Nelly, taking her share, ‘’tis a shame of you to call me so before all these folks!’

“‘Why so, if it’s true, neighbour?’ cried another, while a second slice was held up to be disposed of, and so on till all were served. Then there was such a fluttering and blushing among the maidens as each sought for a bean or pea in her slice, that you would have thought, had you been there, of the way the pigeons sidle and bend to one another on a sunny-roofed dovecote; but for some time no claimant for the honour was forthcoming.

“‘Why, how is this?’ asked one of another, ‘has Master Dulcet cheated us altogether, and forgotten to put in a bean?’

“‘I don’t think he has,’ said the Dame, gazing shrewdly round the circle, ‘there’s a bean or pea

there sure enough, and whoever has it had better come forward and choose a King.'

"Then Nelly, who had drawn back into a corner, came shyly out, and held up a bean, saying, 'It is I who have it, Dame, but I would much rather you should choose the King, as you are the giver of the feast.'

"'Nonsense, what has an old woman like me to do with choosing Kings and Queens? Pick him out for yourself, my girl; though,' she added in a whisper, placing her hands on Nelly's shoulders, 'if my old eyes don't deceive me, you and I would choose the same.'

A grateful look from the brown eyes, and a deeper blush on the soft cheek, were answer enough, and with a pretty curtsy, Nelly paused before the captain.

"'Since your mother will not favour me by choosing, sir, I can but honour her by choosing him she loves best.'

"'Prettily said,' cried the guests, as with a stately bow Master Harry took the Queen by the hand, and leading her into the centre of the circle, set about

choosing the courtiers for the night. This done, the King, with his court following, went solemnly out to fetch two huge china bowls, the pride of the house, which were first carried round the room in procession, and then deposited on the oak buffet at the end of it. Into one he then poured various proportions of wine and spices, while in the second his mother made ready the concoction of ale and roasted apples, that, under the name of 'lamb's-wool,' was to be drunk at the end of the feast. The fiddler began the exciting operation of tuning, while the attendants cleared the room, and the King and court made 'joy-sops' of their cake by dipping it in the spiced wine. After this began the country dances, in which the dancers strove to out-do each other in the lightness and intricacy of their steps; and everyone confessed that nobody could approach the skill shown by King Harry and his jovial Prime Minister, Ned. When the Queen had gone bravely from the top to the bottom and back again, and breathlessly begged for rest, hunt the slipper, hot cockles, and snap-dragon, took the place of the dancing; while the red-faced fiddler, peering across

his foaming tankard, began to settle in his mind what names he should couple together when the winding-up should come. It was quite clear that the alliance between the King and Queen was likely to be a lasting one; and if there were some others who rather envied the lady, they were not so inconsolable but that they might find comfort elsewhere. The revels were at their height when the hostess caught a glimpse of two very conscious faces at the door, where, sooth to say, the fair Susan and her swain had been long lingering, unwilling to face the merry assemblage within. Putting on as stern an air as she could, she called loudly to them to enter.

“‘What is the meaning of this, Susan, that you should go out on the busiest night in the year, and leave me to do your work?’

“‘Dame,’ cried Jenkin, thrusting himself before the discomfited girl, ‘ask your son there to make our excuses, for it is his doing, not ours!’

“‘Indeed! Then as he is King to-night I’ll hand you over to his justice.’

“By this time everyone was listening, so with a serious countenance the King made the guests form

a circle near the wassail bowl, and ordered the Prime Minister to bring the culprits before him. Having questioned them closely enough to elicit a full confession of their proceedings, he pronounced sentence to the effect, that in token of their abjuring for ever all quarrels or jealousies, they must each drink two bumpers of lamb's-wool, the first to the Queen's health, the second to each other's; a command which they obeyed, Susan very shyly, Jenkin with something more than his usual swagger. A few more country dances were called for, that the prisoners might take their part in them, and then Dame Morlake rose, and declared that the hour had come for 'cutting off the fiddler's head,' a ceremony that wound up the entertainment. The actual proceeding was not quite so alarming as the name implies; though it caused a good deal of trepidation among the more juvenile dancers, and of regret among their light-hearted and light-heeled seniors, who would fain have prolonged their amusement beyond the due hour of midnight. The fiddler, with blinded eyes, knelt down by one of the ladies, and in answer to her questions recited the names

of the couples who should be married during the ensuing year. Fortunately none of those so associated were displeased with his choice, so that not a shade of jealousy or regret marred the evening ; and I need scarcely add that the names of Harry Morlake and Nelly Clarke, Susan Bolton and Will Jenkin were received with uproarious delight. Both couples were united ere long, and I think I may pride myself on having borne a part in bringing about their happiness."

"No doubt of that, laddie," quoth Dame Hallowe'en, "and I trow there's more wit in your head than I gave you credit for."

"Thank you, mother ; the goodwill of one's elders is always agreeable, particularly when their ways resemble one's own as much as yours do mine."

"You always have the last word, Twelfth Night," said Christmas, "but you are a good boy on the whole, and I am sorry you are a little out of fashion. Nonsense is at times the best wisdom, and my best and kindest friends do not despise genial customs because they are old. But who is to tell our next tale?"

"Well, father," replied Valentine, "I think I might find a story for you if you like."

"Go on then, let us have it by all means."

Valentine accordingly began :

"You know I don't pretend to much," but was instantly interrupted by Hallowe'en—

"Not pretend to much! you! why you're the most deceptive rogue living, as I said before."

"Now really, mother, you are too uncharitable. My deceptions are a joke to your's, so I think on that head the less we say the better. Besides I was going to remark that I don't pretend to much taste or skill in story telling."

"That depends on what kind you mean," muttered the irrepressible dame, but she was silenced by a chorus of expostulations from the rest of the guests, and had to content herself with wrinkling her already wrinkled brow into lines yet more expressive of incredulity, though a good-natured smile hovered on her lips the while. Valentine began once more as follows :—

"Mine is a simple tale of simple folk, and you must expect it to be simply told. There's a certain

little village called Whiteness, of which I happen to be fond, because the people there are fond of me, and to them my pretty letters are full of honest meaning ; there the incidents of my tale took place. It is a queer little out-of-the-way nook, built partly on, partly at, the foot of a high white cliff, which trends away inland at the end of the one street and is broken by the mouth of a wooded glen, on the other side of which the cliff rises again and returns to be washed by the ocean that skirts it. In the sort of recess formed by the glen, and creeping by patches up the broken ground, are bits of croft where the scanty harvest of the villagers is sown, and between which stand the two or three better houses of the place. Among these is the schoolhouse, tastefully built by the order of a fair Lady Blanche Aubrey, the wife of Squire Aubrey, of the Dene, and tastefully kept by the careful hands of William Makepeace, the schoolmaster, whose head contained more quaint stores of learning than all the other brains in the parish, and whose only recreation was gardening in the little plot that surrounded his dwelling. There, favoured by the

warm air of the hollow, was a fuchsia hedge, in summer a wall of crimson ; there the earliest and latest roses opened their sweet buds, while each side of the schoolhouse was covered with a different creeper, jasmine and honeysuckles on the one, clematis on another ; Virginian creeper, to make autumn beautiful, on a third ; and where the back of the building faced to the north, the sombre green leaves and scarlet berries of the cotoneaster. To the credit of the boys of Whiteness it may be said, that not one of them ever touched a leaf in that garden, though there was a story in the village of how a rough ill-conditioned lad had once for sheer mischief destroyed a rare rose, but was so humbled by the schoolmaster's mild rebuke, and by the discovery that the price of the flower had been obtained by the denial of all but the barest food, that he devoted his earnings for many weeks to replacing it. In the schoolhouse there was a flower of another sort however, a little bright-haired, blue-eyed maiden of nine years old, the source of endless pleasure and anxiety to her father. His had been a late and ill-assorted marriage, and when he laid

his wife in the churchyard he would almost have laid her aside from his thoughts, but for the tiny child whose training was a perpetual perplexity to him, and in whom he feared to see any signs of her mother's weaknesses. As yet, his fears had not been realised; though it might have been observed that the little mouth was set in a firmer mould than was that of the almost old man, who ruled his flock more by love than fear.

“ Having so far introduced him to you, I will take you to the schoolroom on a certain breezy May morning, when the whole world, from the dappled clouds to the busy gulls screaming round the tall rock called the Ness, seemed full of life and delight. The schoolroom door swung open once or twice, when a puff of wind blew more merrily over the fresh-ploughed fields, and with the scents of primroses and violets on its wings, seemed to beckon to the children to come out and play. The schoolmaster himself looked for a moment longingly at the bright sunlight that lay in bars upon the fresh sanded floor, but recalling his attention, rapped vigorously on his desk, as much to rouse his own mind as to startle the row

of youngsters before him, whose eyes wandered so restlessly off their books.

“‘The geography lesson to be said, and the head of the class away, what is this?’ said the master sharply, but there was no reply.

“‘Where is Harry Wilde? Speak, some of you!

“Still no one answered, though one or two looked as if they had an idea on the subject.

“‘A pretty business,’ he continued; ‘am I to miss my best scholar from his place, and not one of you can say why he is absent?’

“Now it was well known that this was a sore subject, and apt to make the master irascible, so a small damsel, who knew also that she would fare better than any of the boys who should bring unpleasant tidings, edged herself forward, and said timidly—

“‘Please, sir, the Sea Queen came into harbour last night.’

“‘Ah!’ groaned William Makepeace, pushing back the well-worn skull-cap that usually crowned his grey hair, ‘and that’s reason enough for Master Harry, I warrant, to desert his old friends. Well,

well ; Reuben, there is no chance of your knowing half the lesson, but you had better take the first questions,' and with an injured air the teacher began to discourse upon the snow-line without noticing the angry flush that had risen on the face of his little daughter. School was dismissed early that day ; Reuben blundered hopelessly in the matter of watersheds, and Andrew Stone could by no means understand the direction of the Gulf Stream, so the books were closed and tumbled into satchels, and as the scholars trooped eagerly out the master was heard to mutter—

“‘But one head among them, and that one gone wool-gathering like any other fool’s——’

“‘Father!’ exclaimed an indignant voice in front of him.

“‘Eh?’ said Makepeace, peering over the high desk, and for the first time observing little Nancy, seated on a bench, her books half packed, her cheeks yet red, and her eyes full of tears that she brushed away hastily.

“‘You shouldn’t call Harry a fool, father, he isn’t, and he doesn’t desert old friends. Because he

likes ships, and wants to be a sailor, you are unkind to him.'

"'Heyday, lassie, is that the way for a chit like you to speak? or think you I don't know better than Harry Wilde what's good for him? Go your ways home to Martha, and don't meddle with what you don't understand. Yet stay, did you know Harry was not to be here to-day?'

"'I knew the Sea Queen was in.'

"'Nancy!' the tone was stern and peremptory, and the ruler was lifted, 'don't prevaricate.'

"'Neither I will, father,' answered the little maiden, flinging back her head, 'but I know you are not fair to poor Harry, and so I didn't want to answer at all when you asked about him in school. I knew he was going to the ship early, and I didn't expect he'd be back in time.'

"The old man gazed at her a moment, and said quietly, 'Child, there are more ways of being fair and unfair than you know of yet. Now go home.'

"Rather awed by his tone, Nancy sped away swiftly, but the blithe wind soon blew the seriousness out of her face as she ran round the garden, ere slipping in

by another entrance to the dwelling-rooms attached to the school. No sooner was she in the spotless kitchen than she bounded on to the lap of a tall old woman who was sewing at the open window, crushing her clean white cap, and half choking her with her vehement caresses.

“‘Deary bless the child, what a little torment she is for spoilin’ my good caps,’ laughed Martha. ‘There now, what are you wanting of me, for I know well enough by your ways it’s something or other.’

“‘My dinner, Martha, to take out with me.’

“‘Bairn, bairn, where are you going with it?’

“‘You know, Martha dear, so I needn’t tell you ; the sea’s just beautiful, and the tide’s coming in, and She’s at anchor there, looking lovely.’

“‘And He’s there, looking like a young scapegrace as he is,’ mimicked the old woman.

“‘Now, Martha, don’t be cross ; he wanted me to come, and I’ll be so good and not get into one bit of mischief.’

“‘Aye, aye, I daresay, that’s what you say before you go, and then when you come back all of a mess,

it's "dear Martha, I couldn't help it!" Do you mind the last time, I wonder?'

"'But I was almost a baby then, Martha, and I'm a big girl now!'

"'So you be, child, so you be; but what am I to say to the master?'

"'Just the truth, you know, Martha,' said the child gravely, 'only if he's a bit cross, you know it doesn't vex you much, and you can get him to be good, and not scold Harry or me.'

"'Well, I suppose you must have your way, as you do have most of times. There, then, there's some cold meat and bread for you, only don't you come back with all your clothes torn; you're getting too big, as you say, to go scampering about the cliffs with that boy.'

"Full of eager promises, Nancy put her dinner into the bag, out of which her school books were unceremoniously tumbled, and hurried down the path, glancing back doubtfully once or twice, as though she feared lest her father should see her and arrest her hasty steps. Martha shook her head and sighed as she watched the little figure, and then busied herself

in preparing the midday meal, to which, by virtue of her position as nurse, adviser, and friend, she too sat down with the master as she called him.

"Before long he entered the house and paused suspiciously before the table, where only two plates were laid.

"'Where's Nancy, Martha?' he asked in an irritated tone of voice.

"'Gone out with her dinner in her pocket.'

"'Gone out! What for, and where?'

"'Well, master, she's away to the beach to see what Harry Wilde's got to tell her about the Sea Queen,' answered the old woman, who, despite Nancy's caution, gave a softened version of what she believed was the child's real intention.

"'And that's your idea of care, is it?' said Makepeace, much vexed. 'Could you not have made her wait for my permission?'

"'Indeed no, for I knew, and so did she, that she'd never get it; come, master, you and I have had words about this before, and I tell you again, you may as well try to cage the wind as keep that child back from listening to sailors' stories. You

wouldn't heed an old woman's warning when I told you where your fine books of travels would lead the boy Harry; and what Harry likes best Nancy will like too.'

" True, Martha, doubtless I was foolish to encourage the lad's wandering spirit; but I loved to see his eye brighten over a book, and forgot that it might stir his young blood too hotly. But Nancy, methinks, might take her father's word for what is good for the boy, and not aid him in his liking for a life that will waste his talents and never repay him.'

" 'She might if she were an old woman like me, but as it is, she'll go the way that looks the pleasantest; come sir, eat your dinner and never fret, the bairn's a good bairn, and bid me tell you the truth as to where she had gone.'

" 'Did she so, that was well,' said the schoolmaster, and soothed by this judicious confession he seated himself at the table and thought no more of his annoyance. Such was his way, and it was one that did no good to little Nancy, who in consequence spent the time pretty much as she pleased, during

the many hours that her father was immersed in some cherished volume. What pleased her most was to be constantly with Harry Wilde, the only child of the village doctor, and the pet of the whole community. Doctor Wilde, a busy man, yet found time to appreciate and enjoy the society of the schoolmaster, and as the two became cronies they naturally talked over the fortunes of their children, alike motherless, and encouraged their being together rather than that they should associate with the children of the fishermen of Whiteness. His father of course hoped that Harry would succeed him in his profession, and the boy's bright intelligence led him to think that he would not be averse to the plan ; while the schoolmaster, who had an unreasoning prejudice against what he called professions without brains, encouraged the idea to the best of his powers.

"As a boy of eight and nine, Harry thought the proposal a very fine one, being impressed with his father's importance in the little village ; but about that period certain books incautiously lent him put far other notions into his head, and when the Sea Queen cast anchor in the offing, his mind was at once

made up. She was the finest vessel that ever frequented the small port, drawn there partly by her captain's relationship to one of the families whose lands crowned the cliffs; and as he was a good-natured fellow, and knew every soul in the place, he very soon discovered Harry's ambition, and made him happy by giving him in charge of one of the sailors, and letting him see the ship.

"This had been two years ago, and was the occasion to which Martha referred, when Nancy, having scrambled out on to some dangerous rocks in order to get a nearer view of the vessel, had had a fall, and come home in a sadly torn and damaged condition. Now, however, she was 'a big girl,' surer footed, and, she imagined, wiser, and not a cloud shadowed her happiness, as after leaving her father's garden she began to run, and arrived flushed and breathless on the beach, where Harry was lying waiting for her. A very pleasant face he had, bold and frank, though just then, as he sat with his cap off and the wind blowing back his fair hair, he looked older than he really was, and Nancy fancied a shade more serious than was his wont. He greeted her eagerly, however,

and in answer to her questions began to tell her of the delightful things the sailors had brought, and finally pulled out of his pocket a curious shell, describing the place where it had been found, and ending by giving it to Nancy 'for her very own.'

"When her pleasure had somewhat subsided, she suggested that they should carry out the plan they had concocted the previous day, and try to get out to the ship, but Harry stopped her and said he'd something more to tell her first.

"'What is it then?' asked she. 'You're not half so jolly as you used to be when the Sea Queen came in!'

"'Nancy! I'm going to run away!'

"Harry spoke as if he meant it, and his companion sat staring at him as if she doubted her ears, till he seized her by the arm and went on sharply,— 'Don't stare like that, Nancy; I want you to be sensible, and help me.'

"'But, oh, Harry, you don't mean it, surely! What would you do it for?'

"'Because a sailor I must be, and there's no other

way. You know as well as I that my father will never let me go, and your father will help him to keep me. Now, one of the men on board there says he could help me to a berth if I were at Hoarcliffe, and the Sea Queen's going round there into dock for repairs. So when she goes I shall start, and meet Tom Blythe there as soon as I can make it out. What are you looking so dismal for?'

"'Oh dear, oh dear,' said Nancy, in whose eyes tears were fast gathering, 'what ever am I to do when you're gone? there will be no one to go nutting or to come out to the Ness Point with me or do anything.'

"'Well, Nancy, I can't help that, you know. I can't stay here all my life, for as to being a doctor I can't endure it; and any way one must grow up some time; I dare say you'll do very well, and then you can write to me besides.'

"'But Harry,' cried Nancy, smiling again as a happy thought struck her, 'father and Dr. Wilde won't let you go, they'll find it out before the time comes.'

"'How can they? You don't suppose Tom or

I are going to peach ; and as for you, why Nancy !
you don't mean to say you'd tell !

“‘I don't know how I could help it if father asked me, and he does ask such a lot of questions sometimes, and I've got to answer them, you know.’

“‘Oh well then, say the best you can, but you must keep my secret ; I thought for a minute you were going to peach, but you wouldn't do such a sneaking thing as that.’

“It was the little damsel's turn to be angry now. ‘I wouldn't be such a sneak as to tell a lie, if that's what you mean. What's come to you, Harry ? I never heard you talk like that before.’

“‘Oh bother, Nancy ! how tiresome you are to-day. Who ever talked of lies ? I just mean, say what you can to your father if he asks you about me, which isn't likely, but keep my secret, and whatever happens don't let out that you know where I am, that's the only way.’

“‘I won't tell if I can help it, Harry ; but I'll make no promises.’

“‘Then Tom Blythe was right ; he called me a fool when I said I must tell you, and I wish I hadn't.

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"'But Harry,' cried Nancy, smiling, a happy thought struck her, 'father won't let you go, they'll find it comes.'

"'How can they?

I must just make some other plan and keep it to myself, and I wish you were out of the way. I thought you had more sense.'

" 'And I wish Tom Blythe were out of the way, if that's what he says to you. I believe it's all wrong together. Why don't you go and speak to your father, instead of slinking away like a coward?'

"The children were silent awhile as they stood, no longer close together, he sullen and angry, kicking the pebbles from beside his feet, she tearful and indignant, eyeing him with a disappointed face and drooping head. In vain the tiny wavelets crisply breaking on the beach reminded them involuntarily of the bright afternoon they were wasting, in vain the sunshine played on the long waves that rolled up too lazily to show their white crests, for the wind had fallen to a mere whisper ; in vain the gulls dived and the Ness grew bluer in the increasing warmth, nothing would soothe the ruffled tempers of the loiterers on the beach. At last the girl made an overture of peace and touched her companion softly. 'Harry, I don't want to be cross, and I'm sure you

didn't mean what I thought you did; come to your father and talk about it.'

"'Nonsense! He told me I must be a doctor.'

"'Well then, wait a little and see what turns up.'

"'Just like a girl. What should turn up, pray? No, Nancy, it's no use coaxing; I'm just going to do what I said, and then some day I'll own a ship and call her the Nancy, after you, only promise you won't say where I've gone.'

"It was a sore temptation; on the one hand the idea of Harry going away angry was too dreadful to think of, and after all her father might not ask her anything about him, and then the idea of a ship being called after her was grand. Harry saw she was giving way and put his arm round her.

"'There, Nance, I knew you'd come to your senses. I'm doing it all for the best, and I'm sorry to leave the old place, and you too; just you believe that, and hold your tongue, and say you know nothing about me; and no more you will, for you don't know exactly where I'm going.'

"This was too palpable. Nancy could not see her way through an argument, but she could see the

lie hidden here, and answered boldly, though she clung so close that Harry could not shake her off.

“‘No, Harry! I do know you’re going to Hoarcliffe. Oh please listen, and don’t be angry, for I can’t bear it. I’ll promise you one thing, if they ask me where you’re gone, I’ll say that I know, but that I won’t tell, and that’s all I can do. I know father will beat me, and I shall be so unhappy!’

“‘Poor little Nance, I believe I shouldn’t have told you, but I know you never break your word, and that’s why I trusted you; now don’t cry, there’s a good girl, but come along, and I’ll get Tom to take you a row.’

“How they went in a boat right round the Sea Queen—how delicious the evening was, and how kind Harry was—how she really tried to keep her frock clean, and only got one spot of tar on it—all this and more Nancy poured forth to Martha that evening before she went to bed, having bid her father good-night first with a beating heart, thankful to be asked nothing worse than the somewhat grim question, ‘Have you and Master Harry had a silly enough afternoon?’

"Little did William Makepeace think how silly a one it had really been.

"It was a drizzling morning, and the school was again assembled some days after Harry had announced his plan, and he was once more missing from the class. Again, to the master's enquiry, no answer was returned, but remembering the last occasion, he addressed his question next to Nancy by name. She, frightened and miserable, well aware that the Sea Queen had sailed, and conscious that, though he said nothing about going, Harry had bid her an especially friendly good-night on the previous evening, stammered out that she did not know where he was.

"Poor child! the interval of the last few days had been a period of prolonged misery, for she could not shake off an inclination to go and tell her father, so that her one constant ally should be saved from all sorts of imaginary perils, and kept forcibly at home; and moreover, the unusual consciousness of having a secret so weighed upon her, that Martha was inclined to think that something ailed her. Her father, struck with her manner, looked at her for a

minute, and then with a ring of vexation in his voice asked her a third time—

“ ‘Do you know where Harry is or not? why can’t you speak out?’

“All the scholars were staring at her, some of them rejoicing that the schoolmaster’s daughter, generally so quick and clever, should have her share of tribulation, but she recovered her courage, and spoke louder.

“ ‘No, father, I do not know where he is this afternoon, I haven’t seen him to-day.’

“Satisfied for the present, the master continued the lessons, but the moment of discovery could not long be deferred, and evening saw Dr. Wilde, anxious and pale, searching in the school-house for his son.

“The two fathers were so much absorbed in their own conjectures, they did not notice Nancy much, Makepeace having at once quoted her statement of the morning; but Martha drew her own conclusions, though as yet she said nothing. Next day, when every possible enquiry had been made, and the cliffs in the neighbourhood searched, she walked into the room where the schoolmaster was vainly endeavouring

to console his friend, and leaning her hands on the table, said in a decided voice,—

“‘That child Nancy knows where Harry is!’

“‘Impossible!’ ejaculated Makepeace, ‘she would have told us if she knew.’

“‘Not she,’ replied Martha, whose sympathy for the boy’s father made her inclined to be hard on Nancy. ‘You take my word for it, she’s in the secret.’

“‘But why should you think so?’ asked the doctor.

“‘Because she wasn’t a bit surprised when you said he was missing, and she never cried or asked a single question; wouldn’t a child like her have chattered about it half the day, if she hadn’t known all that we are trying to find out?’

“The schoolmaster looked terribly angry as he desired Nancy to be sent to him, and the culprit’s little heart sank when she found herself arraigned before her three judges.

“‘Nancy,’ said her father, ‘you never deceived me before, and you had better not begin now. Do you know where Harry is?’

“‘Not exactly, father,’ said the child slowly.

“‘Not exactly! Do you mean to say you know anything about him, and yet you have let us all be breaking our hearts on his account? Tell me instantly everything you can, or it will be the worse for you.’

“Nancy’s face crimsoned, and she looked at Dr. Wilde, for whom she had a great liking, and after a moment’s hesitation almost whispered, ‘I can’t.’

“‘Child,’ cried the doctor, ‘think of me, and of how anxious I am, and don’t be foolish.’

“‘I am so sorry, sir,’ she said coming up to him, ‘so very sorry, indeed, I can’t tell you, for I promised him I would not, but he is quite safe.’

“‘How can a baby like you judge of that?’

“‘Look here, Nancy; if you don’t speak I’ll see if I can’t make you tell.’

“‘Oh, father, don’t look so angry! But I don’t care, I promised Harry, and you shan’t make me break my word!’

“‘We shall see,’ said Makepeace, and from that time poor Nancy was kept a prisoner, and in solitude and tears began to understand that in making that

foolish promise, she had forgotten the obedience she owed to her father.

“Still, though she confessed her fault, she refused to say more than that she had seen him safe and well the night before the *Sea Queen* sailed, and this hint, though quite unintentional on her part, brought a fresh idea to the older heads, which they now wondered had not occurred to them before. A letter was dispatched to the captain of the *Sea Queen* at Hoarcliffe, and was speedily followed by the doctor in person, and an active search was begun among the haunts of the Hoarcliffe sailors. There, after he had been absent rather more than a week, Harry was found, ragged and hungry, yet working bravely for himself at odd jobs on the quays, Tom Blythe’s promises having proved as vain as might have been expected. Thence he was taken home by his father to refit, so that he might enter on his chosen life under the better auspices of the captain; and Dr. Wilde made it a condition, which his friend the schoolmaster could not refuse, that Nancy, on their return, should be liberated and forgiven.

“How the children hugged each other, how Nancy

considered Harry's behaviour and trip something great and wonderful, and how he delighted her heart with his praises of her constancy, you may all imagine. When the two had frankly confessed their mistakes to their respective fathers, and they all sat down to a table covered with astonishing cakes of Martha's baking, a happier party could not have been found in Whiteness.

"From that time Harry pursued his calling with success, and as he grew older and returned to pay his periodical visits to his native place, the childish friendship that had cost him and Nancy so much trouble ripened into an attachment that bid fair to last their lives. She, grown to be a tall girl now, seemed likely to remain in the schoolhouse, at least for her father's lifetime, for Martha was growing old and needed assistance, and Nancy could only be spared for the purpose of giving daily lessons to some of the children of the neighbouring gentry too young to be sent to school. By this means she added considerably to the resources of the little household, and might have indulged in many small luxuries or vanities, had she not scrupulously laid by all she

could, so that she might not go empty-handed to her future home.

“At last the time came for Harry to go on a much longer voyage than usual, after which he hoped that they might be able to marry. He wrote a cheerful letter to Nancy, endeavouring to break to her, as gently as he could, that it was very unlikely that he would get leave to bid her good-bye; but no care could make such news anything but painful, and many were the tears she shed over the pages that she re-read day after day. Some of the village girls of her own age, chattering over the near approach of my special day, tried to enliven her by merry questions as to who should be her valentine; for, said one of them, ‘Since Harry Wilde’s away, you cannot help having some other; there’s many a lad in Whiteness that would like to be first to meet you on Valentine’s morning, Nancy, so that he might be your valentine for a month or two.’

“‘Then I’ll stay in the house all day,’ replied Nancy hotly; ‘there’s not a soul shall say I gave him that name but my Harry.’

“‘What! are you not coming to the drawing of

lots either? You surely won't stay away from that!

"Of course I shall. Wait till you care in earnest for some one, Annie, and you'll understand that I wouldn't have my name put into the valentine lottery for the world. I can have but one valentine, and it will be dreary work when he's gone to sea,' and Nancy turned away, her voice choked with tears.

"The 14th of February dawned gloomily, though there were rifts among the clouds that promised sunshine by-and-by; as yet, however, the dulness in the heavens was not greater than in Nancy's heart, as, moving listlessly down the little passage, she laid her hand on the latch, intending to open the door and go out to milk the cow. Fancying she heard a sound outside she paused a moment, startled, and questioning within herself who could be near the house at so unseasonable an hour. Suddenly she recalled the idle speeches she had heard, and wondered if it were possible that anyone had resolved to force her into becoming their valentine, for in those days such was the fate of the couples who first met in the morning, and great care was accordingly

taken by those interested to ensure their meeting rightly. Nancy shrank back as the idea occurred to her, but shook off her fear after an instant's thought, and saying to herself that no one would care to have a valentine whose heart was far away, she threw open the door, only to be clasped and greeted with the eager exclamation, 'My darling, I thought you were never coming!'

"Very different seemed the aspect of the morning with Harry by her side, and often did she pause in her work to hear how, getting his leave at the last moment, he had walked half the night in order to greet her at that hour. And then they exchanged gifts, some for use and some for fancy, including valentines, and though people say that these last are childish inventions, the quaint loving verses and painted emblems that these two interchanged were to them as solemn earnest as any promises they could make to each other. Happily sped the hours till Harry had perforce to tear himself away, and when he had past the last turn of the road that she could see, stopping and waving his cap ere he dashed round the corner, Nancy hurried to her room and hid herself from

everyone for the rest of that day. Even old Martha could not comfort her, for seafaring at that time was yet more perilous than it is now, and news of the absent came at long intervals, and by uncertain means.

"Harry was to remain away for three years, and two had past, bringing occasional letters that were the theme of village talk for weeks afterwards, when a rumour reached the schoolhouse that his ship had run aground in a storm, and that the crew had been taken prisoners by the French, with whom we were at war. How Nancy bore the blow she herself could never tell, but after awhile she seemed to settle down into an apathy from which nothing could thoroughly rouse her. Not that she neglected her duties, she was of too helpful and brave a nature to do that, but there was never a smile seen on the face once so blithe and cheery, and her drooping figure and thin hands told how uncertainty and sorrow had broken her energies.

"In vain her father spoke of hope, she begged him piteously not to make her more miserable than she already was, for it were worse to think that he was alive and wearing out his years in a prison, than to

believe that he had been among those of the crew who, as they had subsequently heard, were drowned in a desperate effort to save themselves in the boats.

“Once a sailor came to the village who had been on board a cruiser, and was thought by these simple folks to be an authority on the question that racked their hearts. Whether he was touched by pity for Nancy, and believed it best to quiet her doubts, or whether he really thought he knew the man about whom they asked, I cannot tell, but he declared that among the missing boat’s crew was a bright-haired lad with blue eyes and a merry laugh; and from that and other sayings of his, they concluded that it was indeed Harry Wilde of whom he spoke. After this, Nancy grew quieter and more patient in her grief, and so three more years wore away, making five in all since Harry had taken his last farewell of her.

“It was February again, grey and chill, and Nancy was working at the fire-side, while Martha, stick in hand, took her daily turn in the little garden. Old as she was, her eyesight was good still, and at the end of the walk she paused and straightened herself to look at her favourite view across the bay. A

veil of silver haze hung over the calm water, and out of it came a white-winged boat speeding steadily homewards. The old woman drew in a breath of the keen salt air, and muttered to herself, 'There comes what will make someone's heart glad this day,' and so saying she sighed and turned to the land to watch for any chance passers by upon the village road. For a while there was not a sign of life on the long red track that wound between the village crofts and the beach, but at last round the farthest turning came a solitary man, who paused and sat down for a minute on a stone by the wayside, as if to rest, then rose and hurried onwards, with an uncertain step. Martha followed his movements with her eyes, idly wondering whether he was a stranger who would enliven the slumbrous village with foreign news, but as he drew nearer, her face gradually brightened into a look of keen and startled interest.

"'How like, how like!' she murmured. 'Could it be possible after this weary time that he's coming back! Eh me, my bairn, I must warn her; or no, to bid her look out were maybe best.'

"Trembling and anxious, she hastened to the house

as quickly as her feebleness would allow, and sheltering herself in the porch called to Nancy to come.

“‘Come and help my old eyes, child, there’s a stranger coming up the road below.’

“‘What is that to us, Martha dear?’ asked Nancy in her monotonous voice, ‘there’s no one to come here now.’

“‘How do you know that? nay, come and look, for whoever he is, he is turning this way; what if he were a sailor, Nancy?’ The girl came forward, but even that word did not rouse her attention; and though she stood in the doorway, her eyes were still on some intricacy in her work as she replied—

“‘Well, if it were, what can a sailor have to say to us that I care to hear?’

“By this time, however, the stranger was approaching the garden gate, and Martha’s first impression faded as she looked at him through the trellis-work of the porch. Gaunt and pale, he seemed scarcely able to walk, and the hair and beard that half covered his face did not hide the scar of a sword-cut on his cheek; had she seen

the flash in his eyes as he caught sight of Nancy's figure, half hid in shadow, she would not have hesitated to recognise him, changed as he was.

"He stopped a few steps from the door and spoke in a low husky voice: 'Is Mr. Makepeace at home?'

"Nancy raised her eyes an instant and answered as she dropped them again, 'No; but he will be in soon. What do you want with him?'

"The man waited a moment ere he replied unsteadily—

"'To see if he has forgotten old times.'

"'What do you mean?' asked Nancy in surprise, looking up once more, but still with no interest in her face.

"'I mean that as you seem to have forgotten me, I should like to see if he would know me any better.'

"Martha stepped out from her corner and shook Nancy by the arm, exclaiming, 'Is the girl mazed? Can't you see who's there before you?'

"'Nancy!' said Harry, coming close to her with

outstretched hands, 'I am changed and battered, but surely you know me now.'

"But Nancy, instead of meeting him, caught hold of Martha, and white as the ghost she thought she saw, gasped out—

"'It can't be; Harry was drowned three years ago.'

"'Not a bit of it,' he answered, his voice recovering some of its old ring; 'come Nancy, I'm sure you haven't forgotten the valentines we exchanged five years ago this very day; I can tell you what was on them word for word;' but ere he had finished a line of his old verses, Nancy was clinging round his neck, laughing and crying at once, and exclaiming to Martha to fetch her father quickly and tell him that she had found her valentine.

"Bursting in upon the orderly quiet of the school with her news, and too excited to explain herself coherently, the good soul dragged the astonished schoolmaster to the porch, where the sight of his daughter clinging to a shabby and sunburnt stranger, filled him with dismay. No sooner, however, had

he learnt the truth than hurrying back to his gaping scholars, he proclaimed a holiday and despatched the joyous little crowd with cheers and shouts to bring the Doctor to the school.

“What a meeting it was between father and son, and what an evening they spent, to be sure! Every soul in the village insisted on shaking hands with the long-lost sailor, and welcoming him home; and Harry was even heard to say that it was worth while to go through such troubles for the sake of such a return, especially as he had never before known his own value!

“When at last the visitors had gone, and the chairs were drawn close round the homely little hearth, as they had been on that memorable evening when the runaway was brought back from Hoarcliffe, the happiness of the little party reached its climax, and there I think I may leave them; Makepeace quoting what he considered were appropriate passages from his favourite authors, on the glories of war and travel—the Doctor calmly smiling at his old friend’s enthusiasm and his own happiness; the two lovers conducting themselves after the manner of their kind,

and Martha, grown years younger since the morning, chuckling at intervals over the keenness of the old eyes that had been the first to recognize the wanderer.

"I need only add that Harry speedily recovered from the effects of his hardships, under the care of his wife, and that when the two were finally settled in a snug little cottage of their own, the place of honour over the sitting-room mantelpiece was accorded to a pretty carved frame, in which might be seen an old and faded valentine."

Valentine's story earned a round of applause from the party, not excepting Christmas himself, and Mayday observed that she almost wished she had been in Nancy's place, at least, quite at the end of the tale.

"Ah," said Michaelmas, "that would be all very well, you would like the sugarplums without the unpleasant part of the matter."

"I should like to know who isn't fond of sugarplums," laughed Mayday, "nobody prefers what is disagreeable, I suppose."

"No," said Swithin, "but if you do not take the

disagreeables, you can't have the sugarplums, and besides, how tired one would be of sweets if there were nothing else to be had."

"Now, do you really believe that?" asked Valentine gravely, such a statement appearing to him incredible.

"Of course," answered Swithin, "people grumble at my rain when it spoils their pleasures, but I should like to know what the Earth would say if I didn't give it to her. And the pleasure-goers are all the better for it, too, if they only knew it, for they would have fewer good things in life if I didn't help to keep Mother Nature's face cool and fresh."

"Yes, Swithin, you are a useful member of society," replied Mayday, "we all know that, but can anybody explain the use or benefit or history of my opposite neighbour?" and she bowed with another laugh to Michaelmas, who, stroking his white beard, answered in a dignified manner—

"My use, maiden, is to cause an enormous consumption of goose and apple sauce; and as to my history, my memory rather fails me, so that I cannot give a decision on the subject, while the goose-con-

sumers are divided about it, but I can assure you I am of a respectable age, for as far back as the time of Edward the Fourth geese were eaten on my day, and further, large cakes and sometimes sheep were distributed to the poor, so you cannot say that I have not been beneficial, at least in some cases."

"Possibly," quoth Mayday, "we will allow that; but as for age, my good sir, you are a perfect child compared to me, in spite of your white beard. My Beltane fires were lit long before King Edward's day, so pray do not talk of your years again in my presence."

"Truly Mayday, your's have not cured you of sauciness, and if you are so venerable I wonder you do not contrive to look a little more like your years, and dress in something more befitting your antiquity than that flimsy veil and juvenile kirtle."

"You forget that however long I may live, my own morning dew will keep my face young. Don't you know that perpetual youth and beauty belong to those who will go at daybreak to carry the May and wash their faces in the dew, and of course I take a dip myself, just to honour the custom. Very refresh-

ing it is too ; I assure you you can have no idea till you have tried how delicious the bright drops are, scented with the first breath of my primroses ; there's no perfume in the world like it."

"What! not even my roses, sister?" asked Midsummer's Eve.

"Well, they are very delicious, no doubt, though by-the-bye, many of your newest sorts are mere bits of fine colour and have no perfume at all. I maintain, however, that to those who can really appreciate them, my fresh wild flowers are sweeter and more delicate ; yours always remind me of gardens, and of hot days when I feel quite shrivelled up by the sun."

Midsummer laughed at Mayday's idea of the effect of heat, and said, "True, you like the sun to wear a mist veil over his face, and only lift the corner of it occasionally to take a peep at you, that is why your colours are so pale ; your primroses and windflowers and hyacinths, are all delicate, like your own fair self, while I love the full warm sunlight, and paint my roses and honeysuckles and gentians with all my richest tints to please him. However we are sisters still for all that ; remember Beltane fires belong to

me as well as to you, and where your friends collect morning dew mine gather fern seed at night; you have Maypoles and I have a Giant carried in procession; after all, you and I are very much alike."

"And you must needs both be cousins of mine I think," said Dame Hallowe'en, "if we can count cousinship by what folks do in our honour. Do you suppose any of your Beltane fires or Bonfires burn brighter than mine? Mine were a serious business once upon a time, I assure you, for the people put stones round them marked with their names, and if a stone was missing in the morning the person whose name was on it would die before the year was out. And as for fern seed, that was never harder to gather than my hemp seed is to sow; but dear, dear, the world is getting too wise for us now, and folk know better than to vex themselves about a lost stone or to look for a figure behind them coming to mow the hemp they've pretended to scatter. I don't think you'll have many more gatherings like this, Christmas."

The poor old dame looked quite sorrowful as she uttered this lament, and declared she felt a tear

trickling down her nose ; nobody could see it, however, and Christmas rejoined—

“I may not have gatherings of exactly the same nature, but you may be sure I shall not allow myself to be improved into casting off old friends. You may all cease to be treated as powers, but you must remain pleasant memories, and the wisest among men will still turn to you for quaint histories of their brethren of the past. But now, Dame, you promised us a story, and it is quite time you should begin.”

“Well then, I must take off my mutch, for if I were to tell my tale in English with this on, every frill on the poor thing would stand on end with horror.”

So saying, the Dame calmly removed the white cap she had worn, and laid it down beside her, then pushing back her hair, which was as brown and soft as Midsummer's, surveyed the expectant guests with a smile and began as follows, in a low mellow voice.

“I can see everything I am going to tell you as clearly before my mind's eye as though the people and places were present to me now, so I think I shall

just describe some scenes to you as if I were talking about a picture. There is a cottage before me, with grey stone walls and a steep thatched roof, from one end of which the grey smoke curls lazily; outside is the little byre or cowhouse, and a great heap of golden fern gathered for the dun cow; some hens are about the door, looking as if they had just had supper, from the contented way in which they are ruffling their feathers, preparatory to going to roost. All round stretches a wide heathery moor, rising on one hand into low hills that are the outskirts of a wilder range; and sloping on the other to a valley full of corn-land, where, on the banks of a peat-stained river, nestles a little town, whose fast-increasing mills bid fair to make it soon double its present size. The sun is just going down across the valley, and the cottage door is shut for the night; shut on two old women who are drinking their Hallowe'en cup of tea together, while two children sleep soundly in a corner of the kitchen. A clean and cosy kitchen it is, with its whitewashed walls, and its aumrie in one corner, flanked by a spinning-wheel, where many a goodly fleece was spun by Elspeth's busy fingers. The

dark rafters are festooned with bunches of herbs with which she concocts mixtures that the people round believe to be sovereign remedies; and proof of yet another branch of industry, the ample chimney is filled with hams sent to be smoked under her own eye. She is great at this work, and even boasts that not a ham is used at 'the House' unless it has got its flavour from her 'divots' or peat turfs. Beyond the kitchen is a tiny room, where the treasures of the cottage are hung on the wall, a gun, bayonet, and belt, and an old plaid of Gordon tartan, part of the uniform once worn by Angus Macdonald, who had died a year or two before my tale begins. His father had been a tenant on the estate of Strathshian, and when its young owner had become a soldier, after the manner of his house, Angus and several other lads had enlisted in the Laird's regiment. Active and intelligent, Angus was soon chosen to be the Laird's own servant, and in that capacity one of those friendships sprang up between them that were more common then than now. They went through hard service together, and when at last they both left the army to settle down at

Strathshian, the cottage I have described was bestowed on Angus and his wife for their lives ; and numerous gifts besides found their way from the house to the dwelling on the moor. There many a tale was told of the wars, and many a pipe smoked while the old soldier described the strange places he had seen, or recounted some anecdote of his beloved colonel. But he was not destined to enjoy his repose for long, and Elspeth found herself a widow, with, moreover, two children on her hands. One was her own grandchild, Mysie Roy, whose mother, old Elspeth's only daughter, had died at her birth, while her father, a soldier too, was now away on foreign service ; the other, Hugh Maitland, was the orphan son of her brother, Angus Macdonald's favourite comrade and friend. Little Mysie was nearly five, and Hugh Maitland was just seven at the time of which I speak ; and though they were good children on the whole, they were, somehow or other, in constant mischief, and it was a sort of relief to their grandmother, for she took that name from both of them, when they were safely stowed into their beds.

“Now that you know something about her we

will look at her again, where she sits by the fireside ; I was wrong, surely, to call her old, for she is not yet fifty, and though her kindly face is seamed and tanned by exposure to the weather, her figure is straight and active ; and in her dark winsey dress, small shawl of the tartan of the old regiment, and white cap bound with a broad black ribbon, she looks as hale and energetic a gudewife as one would wish to see. Opposite to her, supporting her head on the wrinkled hands that are crossed upon a stout stick, sits old Jeannie Ringan, the spae-wife of the hill-side, the teacher from whom Elspeth has gathered much of her curious store of knowledge, and a firm believer in fairies, pixies, brownies, and all such people. Jeannie is far too old to change her beliefs now, she says ; and though many a visitor to her cottage has talked to her, and the Laird himself once rode down on purpose to try and persuade her that her favourite calf had died from some very simple ailment, and not from witchcraft, Jeannie has continued to hold her own opinions, and contents herself with telling her would-be friends that 'it was aye sae in her day, and sae it maun be.'

“So it must indeed, for ‘her day’ was long, long ago, and it is yet told in the Strath how her husband, ‘Bauld Ringan,’ came to a terrible end, and how since that, Jeannie has lived by herself, never altering the shape or colour of her dress, never going farther than the nearest village, but shutting herself up with her fancies till she seems now to belong, in mind, to a time quite gone by. If there is one place where she appears to be more at home than another, it is in Elspeth’s cottage, where her old pupil always gives her a kindly welcome, and where, while Angus lived, his wild stories had kindled a ready response in her heart, accustomed as she was to a stirring existence in her youth, for ‘Bauld Ringan’ had been the last cearnach, or ‘reiver,’ of the district, and had been shot in a final struggle with the advancing power of law. No one thereabouts thought the worse of Jeannie for her antecedents, for such as Ringan kept faith with their poorer neighbours, and only robbed the rich, and the risk was great enough to fling a certain halo of romantic interest round the occupation. So, to return yet again to the cottage, Jeannie wears her blue cloak and white cap, and mutters her charms

and legends unharmed by those who know well enough that she once aided in concealing the spoils of many a midnight raid. Just now she has drunk a cup or two of tea, one of the Laird's most prized gifts, and the welcome beverage has warmed and brightened the withered face so that she looks keenly at Elspeth, and nodding in the direction of the bed, says,—

“‘What will ye do wi’ yon bairn?’

“‘Do wi’ him?’ answers Elspeth, ‘what should I do with him, but train him in the right way and bid him fend for himself?’

“‘Aye, aye, but ye may bend the sauch twig to yer han’; wad ye gar the lad gang the gait a’ the rest o’ ye hae gaen?’”

At this point in the story Mayday and Midsummer broke into little silver peals of laughter, and begged that this last speech might be translated for their benefit; Hallowe’en sighed, and declared that all the point of her story would be lost, but nevertheless resumed in a more comprehensible phrase.

“‘Would you make the laddie a soldier like those that have gone before him?’ asked Jeannie.

“‘That would I,’ responded Elspeth ‘if I had my own way, but his mother begged me when she died to keep him at home if I could, and not let him leave his bones, like his father, in some outlandish place.’

“‘Tut, why should he, there’s more come home than die, and after all a man must die once.’

“‘True, Jeannie, you know it will not be of my willing if the laddie follows the ploughtail, maybe instead of shoulth’ring a gun. But who knows what his fancy may be, and I mustn’t cross it.’

“‘Elspeth! It’s Hallowe’en night, let us look and see what’s in store for the bairn,’ said the crone putting her hand out eagerly.

“‘Nay then, Jeannie, will you never be at rest with your notions,’ said her friend smiling. ‘What can you tell, unless maybe by chance, and what can it matter to me that have to bring the bairns up, and just see to their cleiding and feeding?’

“‘Elspeth Macdonald, you’re not the woman you were, or a word like that wouldn’t cross your lips. Come, let me try my skill and see whether I prove right or no; though after such a speech as that of

yours, I doubt whether the good people will give me a chance of spaeing.*

"Elsbeth knew full well, by long experience, how useless it was to try and stop her friend, when, as she herself expressed it, 'the mood was on her.' So she rose and, with a smile, asked what spell was to be tried.

"'Give me an egg, that's the best for far away days.'

"'My certie, Jeannie! Do you think you're to get one of my bonnie eggs that I'm keeping for the Saturday market, to waste on your nonsense? You think eggs are as plenty as whins hereabout, may be.'

"'I think there's aye a thing to be found in Angus Macdonald's cottage, when a friend asks it,' replied the old woman impressively, and the widow, who recalled well her husband's open-handed ways, hastened to take the egg from a large bowl on a shelf in the corner; perhaps, to tell the truth, in spite

* Spaeing means fortune telling, and the good people are so called by the Highlanders, who think it unlucky to speak of them as fairies.

of her wisdom, she was not sorry to try the old custom again.

“Now,” continued Hallowe’en, leaning forward and speaking low, “do you not see the two drawing their chairs closer over the fire, and pushing the scattered peats together to afford a better light? Jeannie leans her stick against the wall, and flings back one side of her dark cloak, lest it should interfere with her movements, while Elspeth, her elbows on her knees, grasps with a steady hand a tumbler half full of water. Jeannie looks at the egg, holding it between her and the fire, and mutters to herself, while a sudden gleam from the smouldering turf flings a redder light, and blacker shadows, round the kitchen; then she gently makes a hole in one side of the shell, large enough to let the white drop through, and a smaller one on the upper side so as to blow into it should the process not go on quickly enough. Holding the egg over the tumbler, the white begins to trickle and take fantastic forms as it drops into the water; and the crone scans it anxiously as it falls.

“‘Give me the glass, and you put some fir tops on the fire: I must have more light.’

"Elspeth does as she is bid, and as the cones blaze up, the light falls across the eyes of the sleeping boy, and he turns and sighs restlessly.

"Hear you that ! The bairn in his dreams knows his fortune is being spaed ! See ! it is as it should be : you'll not keep Donald Maitland's son at home like a douce body ; what do you think is there ?' exclaimed Jeannie, pointing to the glass with a triumphant smile.

"Indeed, you had better tell me yourself, for I was never a good hand at reading writing of that sort.'

"Just this then, blind woman that you are. The laddie will be a traveller in some shape or other ; do you not see a great bare plain, and two camels crossing it, and a figure that walks beside them ? What is that but the sign of journeying ? But we'll try again. See, I'll turn the glass once round against the sun. What's this coming ? It's a plain, yet it moves ; no, it's the sea, Elspeth, the sea, and a big ship upon it, and a fortune twice told is a fortune, that's sure. Mark my words, Elspeth,' cries Jeannie, rising and striking her stick on the floor, while the

other seeks to make out in the water all that she has heard. 'Mark my words, Hughie Maitland will wander many a mile before he dies, and it will be an evil day for both of you if you try to cross his fortune.' So saying, and with a sigh of weariness that always follows one of her momentary flashes of spirit, Jeannie draws her cloak round her and turns to leave the dwelling with a muttered good night. As the door closes, Elspeth sets the glass on the narrow mantelpiece, and resting her head on her hands gazes long and sadly into the fire. The cones are burnt out, the light dies down to a sullen red glare, Hughie is still, and there is not a sound but the distant whoop of an owl; the fire sinks lower yet, but still she sits on, perhaps it is only watching the hot glow that has brought the tears into her eyes.

"Five years passed away without any special event occurring to break the ordinary routine of life in the little cottage, as far as the widow's existence was concerned; but the children in after life could recall three separate occasions that stood out from the surrounding monotony with as great a contrast

as that of a rocky island lying on a summer sca.

"The first of these events concerned Hugh most, though already Mysie, with the precocity of a child left in some degree to take care of itself, delighted in hearing anything that interested him. Hugh, as a matter of course, had been sent to the school as soon as he was able to walk the long road by which he reached the tiny group of houses clustered near the kirk and manse of Shian.

"To the boy fresh from the free life on the moor even the few hours spent in school were intolerably wearisome and oppressive, and all the more so since the dull and dogmatic ways of the teacher failed to awake any interest in his mind, while he could not but compare them distastefully with the lessons taught him long ago by his grand-uncle, who though a sufficiently absolute instructor, knew how to rouse and to keep alive his pupil's attention.

"It required but little temptation, therefore, to render Hugh somewhat unsteady during school hours, so that he was soon marked as a mischievous boy, and, as often happens in such cases, sometimes

suffered for the sins of others in addition to his own. One day, his mind being at home with an expected brood of chickens instead of present at his sums, he got into more than usual disgrace and was 'kept in' accordingly, which punishment drove him to exasperation and the consequent desire for revenge ; for, thought he, the chickens will all be out, and Mysie will get the first feeding of them, and I told her I'd see to them myself. So he set his wits to work and bethought him that if he could distract the master's attention for a while he might make his escape.

"The Dominie, who was slow, and moreover short-sighted, was engaged in sorting the books on some open shelves, where his repeated efforts failed to keep order. Softly Hugh stole to the opposite door—the door of the Dominie's kitchen ; his quick eye had spied on a shelf, just inside, some oatcake and a jug. Perhaps the midday supply of milk might be in it ! Anxiously he reached out his hand and took it down, glancing in the direction of the teacher the while, in mortal fear lest he should turn. He was right, the jug was full of milk ; it was lucky he had not spilt it, for the shelf was barely within his reach.

Now for some string: what luck again,—he had an old and many knotted piece in his pocket; in an instant it was round the handle, the jug was in its place, and Hugh seated again on his bench. Horrible discovery! the string is not long enough! He moves from his place to catch it but is interrupted; ‘Maitland, if you don’t sit still and make haste with that sum, you shall have another to do.’

“Hugh bends his head, his eyes sidelong on the dangling string; the master turns back to the books, and pauses to read a passage in one of them. Hugh feels in his other pocket, and discovers a scrap more of thin twine, but it will do. He ties it to the other—he is deft at knots—and slides back along the bench, holding the extreme point of the line in his hand. The Dominie casts a glance at him, but sees naught amiss, when a sudden crash from the kitchen breaks upon his ear, and with an exclamation he hastens there, encountering his sister, horrified and angry, and missing the hurried exit of Hugh and the handle of the jug, which he has whipped up into his pocket with the string.

“It must be confessed that Hugh did not feel

altogether easy as he took his way down the hill on the following morning, but he was not the boy to shrink from punishment, though, perhaps, in this case, he felt somewhat more dismal about it, since, after all, his trick had been rendered unavailing, for the chickens had not chipped their shells !

“The moment he entered the school he saw that he had been discovered, and a suppressed laugh went round among those who had gathered some idea of his performance. Called up before the assemblage, he was asked with grim severity whether he had broken the jug the previous day, and how he had done it ; his disappearance, along with the unaccountable absence of the handle, having roused a train of ideas in the slow mind of the Dominie, clearly indicating him as the culprit. A little shamefacedly, but distinctly, Hugh told his story, and was forthwith solemnly rebuked, not only for his crime, but for boasting of it, the master not being clear-sighted on such matters. Nothing daunted, the boy looked up and spoke loudly, ‘ I’m not making a boast ; I was a fule to play such a trick, but I’ll not tell a lie about it.’ Hughie’s hands stung sorely after his punishment

had been administered, but he walked back to his seat without flinching, and when he had to endure the far more terrible anger of his aunt, who was loth to replace the jug, it was a comfort to him, and to her, though he did not know it, that he had not escaped his troubles by denying his fault, though he knew well enough the Dominie could not have completely brought it home to him.

“The next notable day was one of a different kind, when Mysie first tasted the pleasure of earning something for herself. Elspeth found times harder since her husband died, and was glad to turn to field work occasionally, the pay representing to her some needful article for the bairns. The bairns themselves on these occasions had to go with her, as neither was fit to be left in charge at home. So on a certain morning the three left the cottage, Elspeth putting the key in her pocket, and taking in her hand a basket with their food. The hens had been fed first, you may be sure, and the cow milked, early though it was; and ere the evening milking hour, Hugh, at least, would be home to see to the wants of the dumb members of the family. In the meantime, rejoicing

in the freedom of a holiday, he declared he would earn as much as any man in the field ; and thus they betook themselves to one of the Strath farms where the potatoes were being gathered in. The day was sunny, and Elspeth laid her basket in the shade of a wall, bidding Mysie remain by it. There the child played till the dinner hour, when, weary with bending over the furrows, Elspeth sat down to her meal ; Hugh, too, was hot and tired, for the sun was bright, and the stooping position had tried him more than he had expected, his previous essays at farm work having been of a different kind.

“ ‘ It’s a hard darg,’* he said flinging himself down in the narrow shadow of the wall, ‘ I’d sooner be at Peter Duff’s trade than this.’

“ ‘ I don’t doubt you,’ answered his aunt, ‘ but it’s not every lad that can be a Laird’s game-keeper.’

“ ‘ No, but I’ve a mind to ask him for all that.’

“ ‘ Who? Duff, do you mean? I don’t think you’d stand much chance with him.’

“ ‘ No; I mean the Laird himself.’

* Toil or work.

“‘Then, Hugh, you’ll do nothing of the kind with my free will, for I’ll not have it said that I and mine are always begging from the Laird, for the sake of him that’s gone.’

“Hugh was about to reply, but was stopped by the call to work, and returned to his place in the line. Mysie, now that there was little left in the basket for her to guard, followed Elspeth, and plucking her gown, asked if she might not work too. Her grandmother smiled, and told her she feared Mr. Buchanan would hardly pay a wean like her, but the child took this as a permission, and trotting off to where Hugh was toiling, proceeded to pick up potatoes with all the speed of which she was capable. The farmer, watching his labourers, soon spied the new ‘hand,’ and going up to her, asked her whose bairn she was, and how old; her answer surprised him, and he expressed a wish, as he patted her head, that some of his workers of seventeen would work as heartily as she of seven.

“Delighted with his praise, Mysie toiled on, and when in the evening the farmer presented her with a silver threepence, her pride was unbounded; nor, as

the party trooped homewards in the low light, were there wanting kind hands to carry the little damsel up the long hill that proved too much for her wearied limbs.

“During the following summer, it became necessary for Elspeth to make an expedition to the town, and as she walked great part of the way, it involved her absence till late. The two children, being by this time considered ‘wise-like’ enough to be left, Elspeth advised them to carry their dinners to the hill, and spend their time in gathering a few blackberries for her, besides feasting themselves. To the hill therefore they went, ready to enjoy to the utmost the sunny weather, and the delight of being for the nonce their own rulers. They had a perception, too, of the beauty of the wide moor, and though they could not have put their feelings into words, they would sit silent now and then, gazing out over the sea of purple blossom around them, over the smoke wreaths that hung above the town, over the fair valley lying in a golden bath of sunlight, and away to the dim blue line of hills that bounded the horizon beyond. Then, after a while, Mysie would lie down and gaze between the

stems of the heather, peering so down endless vistas and tangles of pink and lilac bloom, where the golden brown caterpillars crept along the roots, and others with marvellous green bodies jewelled with pink, curled round the delicate shoots above. Later, when they had both wearied themselves with play and were fain to rest, the soft air almost fanned them to sleep, till the strong loud whirr of the rising blackcock startled them, and Hugh, springing up to watch the birds vanishing on their powerful wings, exclaimed—

“ ‘It’s no use talking, I can never take to the mill in yon smoky town ; and if grandmother won’t let me ask the Laird for a keeper’s place, I’ll just ‘list, as my father and grandfather did before me.’

“ ‘But, Hughie, what’s the good of you’re thinking of that now ; I heard Jeannie Ringan say you were but a bairn yet, you’ve time enough.’

“ ‘Oh yes, but when I see those great birds, or the deer with their bright eyes and sharp ears, looking so proud while they listen and snuff the wind, ready to be off if there’s a keeper within a mile of them, I think what a fine life it must be going after them, and watching all the creatures about the place ; and

then again, when I see your grandfather's old uniform hanging up and begin thinking of the stories he used to tell us, it seems as if nothing would do for me but to wear the same tartan myself.'

"'I wonder,' said Mysie thoughtfully, 'what was the meaning of the rest of Jeannie's saying about you.'

"'What was it she said?'

"'It was when you were bedding the cow she turned to grandmother and said you were but a bairn, but she knew by the look in your face you'd be what she said you'd be that Hallowe'en night.'

"'I'll go to Jeannie Ringan myself and ask her!'

"'Oh no, Hughie, don't; folk say there's a brownie in her cottage.'

"Hugh laughed, 'and who do you think believes that, or if there were a brownie what harm could he do? It will take a good deal more than that to keep me from going; but come away, Mysie, the sun's beginning to go down and we mustn't keep the cow waiting at the byre.' So saying he took the child's hand, and lifting the basket on his other arm,

began to retrace his way. As they passed a small plantation Mysie stopped and exclaimed that she saw a lame rabbit near the roots of a tree, nor would she pass till Hugh had searched for and finally captured the tiny creature, with one foot sorely damaged in a trap. Stroking and pitying it, Mysie wrapped it in her pinafore, and they again set out, but had not gone far when they encountered a boy named Dan Howlet, seemingly enjoying an afternoon's holiday like themselves. Now Dan was Elspeth's special aversion, and the children rather shared her feeling; he was about eighteen months older than Hugh, but had been sent as a mere child to the mill, and had there outgrown his strength and his childhood together. Big, rough, and noisy, he was the terror of all younger and weaker than himself, and in this category (knowing as yet no better) he included Hugh Maitland.

"'What's that in your pinafore, Mysie?' he asked, planting himself so that they could not pass him on the narrow track.

"'It's a wee rabbit, and its foot's sore, and I'm taking it home to get well,' answered Mysie,

hurriedly, as though anxious to pay due heed to his question and satisfy him by her answer.

“‘Then I think you’d better give it to me instead. It’s far better to make a stew of it, for what’s the use of taking it home to get well?’ said Dan, mimicking her frightened voice.

“Mysie’s eyes filled with tears, and she glanced at Hugh, whose face was hot.

“‘It’s hers,’ he said, decidedly, ‘and she wants it.’

“‘And I want it too, and I’ll have it!’ and ruthless Dan extended his hand.

“Hugh made a spring and planted a blow in his face that, taking him by surprise, made him stagger; but the next moment he had recovered himself, and the two closed, while poor Mysie subsided on to the bank and wept. They had met while Hugh and Mysie were descending the hill, consequently the advantage of the ground was with the former, who was even then, however, at a disadvantage as regarded size, but he more than made up for this deficiency by his energy and pluck, and Dan soon found that his long arms were no match for the firmer muscles of his antagonist; moreover, like all

bullies, he was a coward at heart, and far from carrying out the British idea 'never to know when you're beaten,' rather caused his own defeat by quaking lest he should be defeated. A last rush from Hugh, and Dan collapsed by the side of the path, whereupon the victor, advising him for the future to mind his own business, gathered up Mysie and her rabbit together, and rubbing his own flushed and somewhat damaged face with his bonnet, proceeded triumphantly homeward. But their troubles were not yet over, as they very soon discovered.

"Peter Duff, the under keeper, of whom mention has already been made, a surly and solitary man, was returning from a day's work on a distant part of the moor, by the same road as the children, and was much surprised to find Dan groaning and half crying on the scene of the battle.

"'Why, what ails you, Dan; and what are you whining about?' asked he, staring at the rueful figure before him.

"'It's Hugh Maitland licked me,' whimpered Dan.

"'Licked you, did he! He must be a stout chap for his size, then; and if I were you I'd keep a

quiet tongue in my head about it. What were you quarrelling about?’

“‘About a rabbit,’ quoth Dan, who did not relish the keeper’s tone, and saw an opening for getting his foe into trouble.

“‘Eh, what was that?’ asked Duff, his professional attention on the alert.

“‘Maitland had got a rabbit, and I told him he was poaching and had better put it down, and he hit me for it.’

“‘Indeed!’ sneered Duff. ‘Look you, Dan Howlet; Maitland may have been poaching, but if he was you didn’t try to stop him. I know you pretty well, though you don’t think it, and I give you fair warning, next time I meet you here I’ll know why you’ve come. I’ll let you off to-day, for I should say you’d had enough as it is,’ and with a contemptuous laugh Duff strode on, and soon overtook the two children.

“‘Hallo, Maitland, fighting and poaching both in one day; that’s a pretty pass for one of the Laird’s favourites to come to!’

“Hugh told his story, indignantly backed by

It was quite beyond him to explain to the child—even if he had understood it clearly himself—that the Pope's share in the matter was only to consider the evidence as to such or such a person's holiness, and declare to the Church whether that person might be truly esteemed a saint or not ; to canonise him, as it is called, that is, have his name enrolled in the list of those who are to be remembered with thanksgiving and held up to imitation :—the little boy had caught up what he had heard about the canonisation of one of his own family, while the servant had been taught by the good Curé of Planche that the saints owed their holiness to God, and so they were looking at the subject from different points of view and did not know how to reconcile their respective notions concerning it.

But the valet's simple words had set the child thinking, and presently, turning over on his chest and pushing back his hair from his face with both hands, he looked up and said, "What *is* a saint *exactly*, do you think, Ambrose?"

"A very holy person, who loves the good God very dearly and is very dear to Him," answered the youth, readily, so readily as to give the child quite a new idea of his knowledge and wisdom.

"Oh !" said the little boy, in a tone of earnest comprehension ; and then with something like a sigh he added, "I

“Hugh was convinced but not comforted, and probably that day would have left a sore feeling behind it, but for an early visit from Muir, the head keeper, who knew his master’s ways better than Duff did.

“‘Hughie,’ said he, ‘I’m glad you licked that ne’er-do-weel Dan, yesterday; it will make him more civil maybe. As to the rabbit, I know you meant no harm, but it’s as well to be on the safe side in these things; now there’s something in my bag for Mysie and you.’

“The something proved to be a pair of young tame rabbits to make up for the lost one. Contriving a house for them, and seeing to their food, the children forgot their woes, and thus with a white stone was marked the third memorable day. Mysie’s allusions to Jeannie Ringan, however, were by no means forgotten, and true to his intention, Hugh took an early opportunity to pay her a visit.

“The old woman at first hardly seemed to observe him, but continued to crouch by her hearth, where a small fire was burning, and mutter to herself vacantly.

“‘You want some peat, I think, mother,’ said Hugh, and stepping round to the back of the cottage, he carried in an armful and threw it down; then peering into a large iron pot that stood empty by the hearthstone, he added, ‘You might have some water in here too,’ and suiting the action to the word, he took a broken jug in his hand and speedily fetched some from the burn close by. At last the pale eyes brightened a little, and the old woman spoke.

“‘Who’s this that comes so cheerily to care for the wants of a poor body like me?’

“‘Hugh Maitland, Mother, Elspeth’s nephew.’

“‘Aye, aye, I know you now. And what’s brought you here, laddie; you’re too young to have come on your own errand, so who’s sent you?’

“‘But I have just come on my own business and no other. I want to know what it was you said about me one Hallowe’en night.’

“‘Ha! ha! the spell’s beginning to work, is it? And so soon, too! Yet Elspeth laughed at the old woman’s talk; but we’ll see who’s right. Well, my bonnie bairn, I just read your luck in an egg, and

twice over I saw that you'd be a traveller, and go to the east.'

"'That means a soldier, then. Hurrah!' shouted Hugh.

"'May be, may be; but there's other folk go over the seas beside soldiers. Yet, if you're the laddie I take you for, you'll not bide at home, when there's wonders to see and wealth to win out yonder,' replied Jeannie, nodding her head in the direction of the south.

"Hugh stood thinking, with his hands in his pockets, a wonderful contrast to the shrunken figure in front of him. Strongly built, with a ruddy cheek and close curling black hair, he looked certainly more fitted for a life of adventure than for the quiet ways of home; while the beldame, scrutinizing him sharply through half closed lids, her cloak drawn round her, and her bony hands extended to the heat, was as like the pictured witches of story as a living creature could be.

"'Mother,' said the boy after a while, 'folks say you believe in all sorts of queer things; do you really believe in Hallowe'en?'

“‘You ask *me* that! me, when I’ve told the fortunes and foreseen the fate of them that were grey before you were born! You should have luck in the world, laddie, if a cool tongue would bring it you.’

“‘Then you think it’s all sure,’ said Hugh, in no way daunted by the old woman’s tone.

“‘As sure as ill luck pursues you if a hare crosses your path in the morning; or that to part with your friend on a bridge parts your friendship as well. When I was a bit lassie, and went to the barn ‘to winnow three wechts o’ naething,’ do you think it was any figure but Ringan’s that passed by me in the light of the moon, or do you think when I had fathomed the stack three times, that it was anyone but he that caught me in his arms on the far side o’t? I could tell you many a story besides, but what boots it, they that believe the old stories, don’t need to hear more, and as for them that won’t believe, the good people may see to them. Are you content, laddie?’

“‘Aye, mother; I’m content enough to know that I’ll see what’s beyond those hills some time; and so I’ll wish you good day.’

“ ‘Good day to you ; tell your grandmother not to forget Hallowe’en. And hark ye, Hugh, if you want to burn a nut alongside of your own come next Hallowe’en night ; call it Mysie Roy’s.’

“ ‘Havers !’ ejaculated Hugh, laughing and running out of the cottage, while Jeannie reached out her arm for another peat, muttering to herself,

“ Havers, said he ! My word will come true for all that !’

“ Now ‘havers’ is a perfectly untranslatable expression, unless I may render it by the schoolboy phrase of bosh !

“ Five years had passed, as I have said, when that rare visitor, a letter, came to Elspeth Macdonald, announcing that Mysie’s father was on his way home with his regiment, and that he hoped soon to obtain furlough and be with them. The children hardly knew how to pass the time till his arrival, and when at last he came, and they had got over the shyness that had grown up in his long absence, he appeared to them everything brave and beautiful. Naturally, Hugh’s dreams of becoming a soldier grew more and more vivid, and as he fingered the bright gold stripes

on the sergeant's sleeve, or got permission to don the crimson sash, it seemed to him that to wear the like dress would be the climax of happiness. He had a Highlander's quick perception of the advantages of appearance, and he marked well the contrast between men of Roy's own rank in life, with the slouching figure and stained clothes of the labourer, and the upright carriage and clean white jacket that made Roy, even in undress, look, Hugh thought, like a gentleman beside them. The trio then were inseparable, and, it must be confessed, if the Dominie was unpopular before, he became unbearable when contrasted with this new attraction; till Roy, who knew the value of opportunities, declined to speak to Hugh if he played truant, and warned him, moreover, that the gold stripes were not for those who shirked school. Once clear upon this point, and a motive for work being now supplied, to school Hugh went, and worked with a will, so that from being the veriest idler of all, he was soon at the top of his class, to the great astonishment of the Dominie, and the puzzled dismay of the former dux.

“Will you have another picture of the family in the cottage, on an autumn afternoon?”

“Something is going forward, for Elspeth is carefully wiping the table, while a certain gravity is on all the faces. There is not a speck on the white wood, and Elspeth looks up at Roy, who lays his clay pipe on the mantelpiece, and going into the inner room brings the bayonet, the gun, and belts from the wall. He lays them gently on the table, while Hugh draws near and Mysie holds her grandmother's dress as though she feared there were ghosts about the old steel. She meanwhile opens a drawer and brings out one or two further relics, which she lays beside the rest, then she takes down the plaid, brushes it, and sees that no moth has touched its folds; and if she drops a tear or two on it unnoticed by the others, and fastens it up again as tenderly as though its dead wearer could see her, she will not let the cloud that hangs over her own past shadow her face when she responds to the sunny glances of the bairns. Meantime, Roy, with a heedful hand, cleans the disused weapons, and in answer to Hugh's whispered question, ‘Wasn't Uncle Angus a great soldier?’

replies, 'He was a good one, Hughie, for he did his duty.' I think none of us could wish for a nobler epitaph than such a sentence as that.

"Ere Roy left the cottage, he and Elspeth held counsel as to the bairns, and decided, though much against their wish, that Hugh must go to work at the mill, since he was growing a big lad, and needed to do something for himself. The necessities of the case were explained to him, and seeing them as he did, clearly, he submitted with as good a grace as he could muster, only stipulating that Roy should bear in mind how, in six more years, he would be eighteen, and consequently able to enlist. To this the sergeant agreed, and having made all needful arrangements, Hughie entered on his first experience of real labour. He thought his head would turn too, when he found himself in the very centre of a great room full of wheels, whirling and rattling till nothing but their own hideous din was audible. After he had grown accustomed to the noise, he came to take a certain interest in the deft iron hands that twisted and wove the wool so neatly, and was forced to confess, after all, that his work was less unpleasant than he had

expected. Still the confinement was disagreeable, and the monotony tiresome; and often beyond the growing web rose the vision of a white tent and a group of soldiers at a camp fire, so vividly described to him by Roy. Times were growing harder, and little Mysie was obliged to contribute her mite to the household store, happily not among the terrible looms, the sight of which made her cry, but in lighter work, suited to her age and powers. Hugh took care of her to and from the mill, and found her a cheery little companion, so that one day as the two walked along, talking eagerly together, Jeannie Ringan, gathering fern, muttered as they passed her, 'The nut will be Mysie Roy's, Hugh, come Hallowe'en,' and this time Hugh did not say 'Havers.'

"Hallowe'en came round, and there was to be a great gathering of the mill hands, to which Hugh with difficulty extorted leave to go, and to take Mysie for an hour or two.

"The owner of the works was newly married, and in honour of the event allowed the Hallowe'en festivities to take place in one of his stores, cleared for the night.

case. When he had finished acting the story of S. Martin he suddenly burst into tears, and flinging himself on the ground beside the supposed beggar gave way to such a passion of sobs that Ambrose could not think what had come to him.

"What is the matter, sir?" he asked, kindly. "Don't cry so, try and tell me. Have you hurt yourself, or tired yourself, or what?"

"Oh, no, Ambrose, it is not that," sobbed the child, "but I am not the least bit like S. Martin except pretending. When I was walking out last Saturday there was a poor beggar, fast asleep, lying across the path, and Etienne knocked him out of my way with a stick, and I laughed. He was in rags, and his feet were all sore, and Etienne said he ought not to have put himself where people of gentle birth could see him, but if I had been S. Martin I should have given him some of my own clothes to cover him up."

"Perhaps you will meet him again some day, and then you can try to be like S. Martin to him," suggested Ambrose, consolingly.

"Do you think my mother would be angry if I cut my cloak in half? Perhaps I might give it him all, and then if I gave him my gold crown-piece as well he might buy himself some other things. Did S. Martin give a crown-piece to *his* beggar?"

English alike. From the ceiling was hung a stout rod, on one end of which was fastened an apple, and on the other a lighted candle, and he that wished to play had his hands tied, and endeavoured to catch the apple with his teeth, as the rod was spun round and round. A ring of players was soon formed, and great was the fun as one after another, failing to catch the apple and not springing back quickly enough, received a blow from the other end of the rod with its flaring candle. At last, Hugh succeeded in getting hold of the apple, and in his satisfaction at his success, forgot the nationality of the game. To this succeeded trials of fortune of every sort, some going outside sowed imaginary hemp seed, and looked behind them to see the apparition of their lover; some pulled up 'kails' from their gardens, and by the colour and taste of the heart, guessed the complexion and temper of their future partner in life; some hung up a wet sleeve before the fire, expecting a similar vision to come and turn it; then others, provided with bags of nuts, placed them by twos in the embers, and watched earnestly to see how they should behave. One girl, tired of burning nuts on

her own account, since the one she named invariably flew out of the fire, turned to the two children, who were looking on, and offered them some out of her bag.

“‘You two bairns are aye together,’ she said; ‘burn some nuts for yourselves, and see how you fare.’

“Mysie was delighted; she thought it would be a fine thing to have the ceremony tried for her, and pressed forward, but Hugh looked half vexed, the more so that the girl laughed at his discomposure. However, Mysie had chosen her nuts and placed them judiciously, holding Hugh’s hand to steady herself the while; and as she watched them burning safely and gradually, her own face glowed with her childish pleasure.

“‘See, Hughie, see,’ she cried, ‘they’re burning finely; they’re red hot and neither of them burst; see, they’ve burnt right out and never moved, so I’ll be your wife when we’re grown big, and you’ll just take care of me all the time!’

“There was a merry laugh at Mysie’s expense, that made Hugh draw her back sharply; but though

he pushed his way through the throng to the other end of the room, he never forgot the scene; the dancing firelight, the lasses of all ages crowding together, some kneeling to place their nuts, some standing up to see over the heads, the red glow falling on their bright cotton dresses, little tartan shawls, and coils of yellow hair, and in the centre of the group Mysie's laughing face as she saw the happy augury that Hugh would 'just take care of her all the time.'

"We must let another five years slip by in fancy before we look at the bairns again; hardly bairns now, for Hugh is a tall lad, past seventeen, and Mysie a well-grown girl of fifteen, able to do a good day's work at the mill, but, thanks to her grandmother, able also to do a better in her own house. No one can make better scones or milk a cow more deftly than she; and when Hugh sometimes jokingly reminds her of her intentions regarding him, he is wont to add that he thinks he might do worse than take her at her word, while she retorts that he had better see first if she hasn't changed her mind. There are no signs of the change,

He keeps on calling children to Him now He is in Heaven, at least I have heard our Curé say so."

"Do you think He will be pleased if I promise Him to be like S. Martin when I grow up?"

"I think it would please Him better, sir, if you began to be a saint to-day."

"Oh, but that is not possible," said the little boy, with full conviction. "On the contrary, I have just been very naughty."

Ambrose was silent, and the child who did not like these frequent silences, pulled his shirt-sleeve to make him speak.

"I shall not think it rude if you say I was naughty, Ambrose," he said.

"Oh, no, sir, I understand, but I was thinking of a saying in my village, 'The bad past need not swallow the good future.' If you begin by being sorry for having displeased the good God, why that is how the saints began, there is no better way than that."

"But, Ambrose, used the *saints* to be naughty then, before they were made saints?"

"Some of them used, I think," said Ambrose, hesitatingly, as if he feared to speak irreverently of the blessed ones. "I have heard our Curé tell of some who even led wicked lives before they knew better. And besides, they did not get

them is the proudest possible career. He had only, with what patience he could, to get through a few weeks more of work, and then he would lay aside his labourer's dress, he thought, unwitting what changes were in store. The owner of the mill had brought down from England some new machinery and was anxious to have it tried, though it seemed that some of it had been slightly damaged in the journey ; it was but a slight strain however, and no one thought that any harm could come of a trial, so all was prepared, and Maitland, as an experienced hand, was called to assist. Everything at first went well, but just when the overseers were congratulating themselves on the success of their experiment there was a slight check, a strain, a crash, and two or three of the workmen were lying maimed and senseless amid the wreck of the new looms.

"Maitland appeared to be comparatively little hurt, though Mysie's face blanched when she saw him sitting outside, his head bound up in a handkerchief ; although he made light of her fears, and declared that a broken skull was easily mended.

"That indeed was cured as speedily as he expected,

but Hugh soon discovered that a terrible misfortune had overtaken him, for the sight of one eye was almost gone, and his dreams of soldiering were at an end for ever. With them seemed to end his whole interest in life, and while still unable to return to work he would sit the whole day at the fireside, moody and silent, and scarcely rouse himself to attend to the expressions of sympathy or offers of assistance that reached him from many who pitied his disappointment. In vain Elspeth reasoned and rebuked by turns; in vain Mysie, abandoning her coy ways, hung about his chair till her grandmother sharply bade her attend to her duties; nothing stirred or interested him. At last Elspeth wrote to Roy, begging him to come if possible, and as she sternly said, 'bring the laddie to his senses.' Happily he was able to comply, and the sound of his resolute footsteps ringing on the pathway brought the first gleam of hope to Mysie's tear-dimmed face, and the first sign of shrinking nervous consciousness to Hugh's. The sergeant's salutation had the effect of a mental shower bath, for he told the boy he had expected him to behave like a man, not like a

bairn that sulks when it does not attain its desires ; and after a little more of such treatment, shame and his natural energy combined awoke him from his apathy. What he was to do was the great question, for the mill did not promise much advancement, and he could hardly bear to think of returning to it. One evening as they sat talking he said with a sigh, 'How about Jeannie's prophecy now, grandmother? I doubt I shall never travel.'

"'I'm not so sure of that, Hugh,' answered Roy.

"'How so !' exclaimed the others in a breath.

"Well, I have been thinking of what I believe would be best for you, only I was afraid to speak of it till I had made sure ; but now I have heard from my friends, and I think it's the best thing you could do. What say you to emigrating?'

"'Well,' said Hugh, 'that is extraordinary ; I remember old Jeannie telling me there were more ways than one of going over the seas. I wish all her words may come as true,' and he glanced at Mysie, who was looking very grave over this new proposition.

“‘Never mind Jeannie; can’t you give one a better answer than that, laddie,’ said Roy, impatiently.

“‘Yes, I think it’s a very good plan, if I see my way at all,’ replied Hugh, to whom the mere idea of action seemed to bring fresh courage; and for the next hour he and Roy were anxiously discussing the scheme—how the mill-owner, regretting the accident, would assist with the passage-money; how Roy knew of a little colony of Highlanders in Canada, among whom were kith and kin of his own; how the out-door work would be exactly to Hugh’s taste; and how, last but not least, an emigrant ship was to sail from Glasgow, where his regiment was, in six weeks from that time.

“The boy’s mind was speedily made up; it remained for Elspeth and Mysie, woman-like, to reconcile themselves to a departure so different to the one they had imagined. To the old soldier’s wife it was nothing—nay, it was natural to see the laddie go away, as her husband had done, to a life of daring and glory; but to leave his country in this new fashion was, to her, dreadful, ‘seeming,’ she said, ‘as though he’d done something he was ashamed of.’

She was too wise a woman, however, to breathe her dislike, except to Roy ; and the resources of the little household were strained to provide the traveller with a decent outfit. The laird, very old now and feeble, sent a contribution that materially helped ; and the time drew near when he must set off for Glasgow.

“And now Hallowe’en comes round again, and Hugh asks Mysie if she is not going to try her fortune, since his has come so true. She, half-shy, half-pleased, thinks she will ; and he persuades her to go and dip her handkerchief in the burn by the cottage where Jeannie Rangan once dwelt, now fallen into decay, for the old spae-wife has been long dead.

“‘It’s true, Mysie, the burn should be where three lairds’ lands meet, but you wouldn’t find such a place hereabouts, so maybe the gudfolk will let that one do as well since it’s the march* between two farms.’

“‘Maybe they will, Hugh ; well I think I’ll go, but not very late though, for I don’t care about crossing the moor, and there might be some of Jeannie’s Brownies about the place.’

* *March*—Boundary.

“Hallowe'en was a clear moonlight night, and Mysie was too absorbed in her own reflections to perceive that Hugh was missing. Timidly, for she was not free from superstition, she stole out, carrying an apron under her arm and holding a plaid closely about her head and face. The heather was glistening dewily in the moonlight, and the damsel, if she saw a fern shake, would pause and look round with an unwonted timorousness of which she felt slightly ashamed. No Brownie or other supernatural being appeared, however, and she moved on more quickly, and was in the act of stepping on to an old road that crossed the moor, when her quick ear caught the sound of a small stone rolling down the bank further on; again she stopped and looked down the track, but saw nothing stirring among the white pebbles that covered it; suddenly from between the shadows of the heather a dark object emerged, and Mysie's heart beat loud as she watched it creep stealthily down, but the moment it moved into the moonlight her fears took a fresh form, for she perceived that the dreaded Brownie was neither more nor less than a fox setting out on his night's foray. Trembling now for her chickens,

Mysie energetically threw stones in his direction, the clatter of which sent him speeding over the brow of the moor, while she hastened on, her previous terrors quite lost in her anxiety for her cherished poultry.

“Having reached at length the tiny burn whose tinkling sound made a musical chorus in the stillness, as it pattered over a stone or whispered among the grasses, Mysie knelt down and slowly dipped one end of her apron in the water. The old cottage was just behind her, the roof half fallen in, and the door hanging by one hinge ; below the moss-grown rafters that remained were pits of black shadow, and a solitary pane left in the little window shone a bright patch of light in the moon rays. A plant of sweet gale grew where the garden had been, and a straggling wild tansy reared yellow blooms close by, while behind the cottage a tall birch waved its long branches in every wind that blew ; it was a haunt for ghosts to dwell in, and so Mysie thought as she waited, kneeling on one knee, and glancing over her shoulder at the half open door, while her white apron moved gently on the current of the burn, but the ghost was a very substantial

one that stepped out from the doorway, and taking the apron out of her hand exclaimed laughingly, 'You needn't look so scared lassie, you'll see nothing worse than me to-night, and now you've tried your luck and got your answer, and you owe a kiss to whoever appears to you on Hallowe'en.' Mysie was not loth to comply, and as the two walked homewards, Hugh indulged in some castle building for the future, to which she listened with a willing ear. Elspeth indeed said the bairn was not old enough to know what she was talking about, but as Hugh reminded her that he must speak now or never, it was ultimately agreed that when he had made his fortune, a thing none of them seemed to doubt, Mysie, if she were still of the same way of thinking, should follow him to Canada. The day came when the travellers set forth for Glasgow, and as Elspeth locked the door of the cottage behind her she felt indistinctly that another turning point had come in their lives.

"It was long since she had been in any large town, and the noise and bustle confused her, so that she loitered to gaze in bewildered surprise at the crowded streets,

while the passers-by stared in their turn with curiosity at the little group ; Elspeth, clad in her old-fashioned blue cloak and broad-frilled cap, leaning on Mysie's arm, while she, though somewhat more modern in her dress, equally betrayed her country habits by the puzzled expression in her face as she turned to Hugh to remark on some new wonder. It was fortunate that Roy was at hand to pilot them through the streets and establish them in one of those quiet waterside inns that were still to be found, looking out upon the Clyde and the tall masts that crowded the yet limpid stream. Here, gazing at the shipping, old Elspeth seemed to awake as from a dream, and began to recall the brief journeys she had made before her husband left his regiment to settle in Glenshian. Mysie listened to the oft-told tale with a new interest now that the great vessels were before her eyes ; but Hugh, still sore at heart when he thought of his blasted aspirations, turned abruptly away, and sauntered out to enquire how far down the river lay the great ship that was to bear him to the unknown land.

“Two more days saw him safely ensconced on

board and taking sad farewell of the three friends who filled his little world.

“That deck was a piteous sight for an hour ere the last bell hurried all visitors into the boats that rocked below the gangways. There were crowded young and old, alike too feeble to be left behind ; some few going out to join the friends already gone ; others, like Maitland, going to make a home for those who now struggled to say farewell ; whole families, some of whom had never before been beyond the rocky boundaries of their own glen, and who now clung together in their woe ; and solitary passengers leaving the old country because she held no tie to bind them to her. Here and there among these groups might be seen a bunch of heather, or a plant cherished in a flower-pot, that the emigrants bore with them to keep green in the new land the memory of home. But the bell rings, and down the dark ship's side there begins to move an unwilling stream of departing friends, whose sad faces yet look up to the deck they have left. Boat-load after boat-load pushes off from the side to await at a little distance the first movement of the vessel ; the

passengers crowd every available foothold to take their last look of the boats, and then the huge mass begins to tremble and throb, the paddle moves, and with a wild cheer, responded to by the lookers-on, the great ship passes statelily out into the river, and steams away upon her path, many an aged man gazing after her and all she bore, with streaming eyes and grey uncovered locks tossing in the wind.

“Roy saw Elspeth and his daughter off on their return journey that afternoon, for their money was nearly gone, and they could not stay to indulge their grief; but Elspeth wept feebly in her corner of the railway carriage, and murmured to herself that she at least would never see her boy again. Weary and sorrowful, they left the coach that had brought them to their native glen, and prepared to climb the ascent to their cottage. Then, indeed, Mysie began to realise their loss, as her grandmother leaned heavily upon her arm, and sighed to find the hill so long. Every step of the way was associated with Hugh and brought fresh tears to the girl's eyes, but she had to turn from her own thoughts to the household

needs ; for, as they entered their home, cold with the chill of disuse, Elspeth sank upon her bed, so worn with mental and bodily fatigue that Mysie was almost too terrified to think of what could be done. A bright fire and a cup of tea revived her after a while, and next day she resumed, though somewhat drearily, her ordinary mode of life ; but Mysie wrote to her father ere long that her journey and the parting with Hugh had certainly been too much for Elspeth's powers, for from that time she never recovered her old energy and spirits. They flashed out brightly the day that the wanderer's first letter came, full of happy anticipations and wondering descriptions of all that he had seen ; and though the temporary light died out again, Elspeth was certainly less dull after this new bond had appeared between her and her boy, making his existence seem the more real as she smoothed with her withered hand the well-read sheet that lay always beside her within the cover of her Bible.

“ This first epistle was followed by many more : some recounting the troubles that had beset the strangers on their first arrival, others filled with

anecdotes and fun ; but all rejoicing that the writer had gone to so prosperous a land. We will take a look at him on a Hallowe'en night a year after he had gone out. He is encamped in the heart of an immense forest, he and a few others, active fellows like himself, who have 'blazed' their way through the forests, and are now going to mark out a fresh track in another direction, so that those who follow them shall find the 'clearing' begun. They are pioneers, in fact, and have plunged into the dark recesses of the woods, tracked their way through tangled undergrowth, struggled with the difficulties of all kinds that attend on such a life ; sometimes almost losing themselves as they went further and further into that unexplored wilderness of trees, but never losing heart, and always by patient labour gaining more and more ground, letting in more and more sunlight as the huge trunks fell before their ringing axes. To-day they have had hard work, and, supper over, they are resting round the fire for awhile before they go to sleep in the small white tents that, with a rude hut of branches, form their camp. Some of them are from the same neighbour-

hood, and fall to talking of those they have left behind; while they recall the old times, and even start a song or two in memory of them, but Hugh lying silently by the fire, hopes and believes that Mysie is thinking of him, and wonders if the year that has gone has made much change in her. One bronzed worker at last suggests that they should try to burn some nuts that they had gathered that day during their work; he produces a handful, and though they are so damp with the heavy dew that they will only smoke, they help to pass the time for awhile, till it begins to grow dark. Then, joining hands round the remains of the fire, there rises a hearty chorus that makes the air ring again, a chorus that has resounded all over the world, for there is never a gathering of Scottish wanderers without, at such times as Hallowe'en, some attempt to recall the home-like strains of 'Auld Lang Syne.' What is Mysie doing meantime? For her, Hallowe'en has been a gloomy day. Her grandmother's health is failing more and more, and the girl feels as though the brightness and strength had gone out of her life with Hugh's departure, so, as she too sits over the fire, there are tears

on her face, and she has hardly courage to burn the nuts, which ceremony, nevertheless, she would not for worlds omit. There is something wrong with the fire to-night however, the peats are not so well dried as when her cousin used to see to them, and they give out a dull, smoky heat. Perhaps that is the reason that the nuts won't burn, perhaps Mysie has not taken the same care to prepare a glowing bed of ashes for them. Whatever the cause, burn they will not, and one bursts with a loud crack, and leaps away into the corner, seeing which, poor Mysie with a deep sob, rises to go about her work, saying to herself, 'I just thought that : Hugh's too far away to care about me now, and it would be better for me to forget him.' Easier said than done, though, as she found when she tried to carry out her prudent resolve. Other troubles were at hand besides imaginary ones, for the old Laird died, and as he had never married, the estate passed to a distant relation, who, born and bred in England, cared nothing for it, and speedily made arrangements for its disposal. It was bought by an English merchant, named Carpe ; and great was the dismay of the inhabitants, when they found that his

first proceeding was to dismiss the whole of the keepers and others employed about the place, and bring down in their stead Englishmen like himself, who understood nothing of the ways or customs of the people, and could neither appreciate their simplicity nor be tolerant of their pride. In pursuance of their schemes for improvement, such pensioners as Elspeth got instant notice to quit; but the shock of the Laird's death and the idea of leaving her own cottage were too much for the sensitive old woman, and she too died, glad that she should escape, as she told Mysie, the troubles that were coming. The poor girl, gathering together her few treasures, and whatever she could carry of her grandmother's, set off to join her father as a preliminary to going out to service, the only possibility left in store for her. Life seemed hard indeed when she turned her back upon the old home, and harder still when she had to give the keeping of the precious household relics into strange hands, though she knew they would be well cared for. Perhaps it was the bitterness of parting with them that stirred Mysie to utter what was construed and repeated as a threat by the new-comers. She was

reluctantly carrying her grandfather's gun and plaid to the manse, when she encountered the English bailiff, whose rough and tyrannical ways had earned him the detestation of the countryside. Standing before her, with his hands in his pockets, he asked if the women usually carried weapons in these outlandish parts? Something in his sneering tone set Mysie's Highland blood boiling in her veins, and with a fire in her eyes that daunted the man in spite of himself, she replied with scorn equal to his own, 'Of course, and some of our lads will maybe teach you our old saying, "that the Scots wear short patience and long daggers!"'

We need not follow her through her experiences as a servant, experiences that taught her at least longer patience than when she met the bailiff on the hill; but though her cheek was paler and her gait less proud than in the old days, she was more hopeful and helpful now than in the comparatively untried life in Glenshian. Years sped on, and Hugh was settled at last and in a fair way to fortune, as he told her when he wrote begging her to come out to him. Remembering the possible changes that

time might have brought about, and fearful of seeming to tie his cousin to a promise made when she was a mere child, his letter was more coldly worded than it might have been. Mysie, in whose memory the Hallowe'en nuts yet rankled, was quick to see and to misunderstand its tone, and hastily concluding that the writer no longer loved her, she wrote that she was not one to keep him to an engagement he evidently wished to break off. Her letter reached him at an unfortunate time, when war had suddenly blazed fiercely out over the whole country, and Maitland shared in the general excitement. Moreover, he had received a piteous appeal from an old fellow-passenger, imploring him to help her to find a substitute for her only son, who was expected to join a company of Scottish volunteers, and whose health was too bad to leave his widowed mother any hope that he would survive the hardships of service. Bitterly disappointed at Mysie's refusal, Hugh eagerly offered himself as the substitute, and hastily arranging that the delicate boy he so well remembered should take what share he could of his own work, he travelled almost day and night, till he found himself enrolled in the army of

the North. Hard and hot work he had for months after, and more than once, as he thought of the chances of the next day's fight, he regretted the hurried note in which he had informed Mysie of his destination. At last, during a lull, when the two sides were gathering their strength for a final tussle, he wrote fully and frankly to Roy, and it was with a strange mingling of quiet gladness, and regret for her misplaced coldness, that Mysie understood the love she had rejected. She still hoped, however, that a happier fate might be in store, for with a soldier's recklessness, Roy again and again assured her that the laddie would come out safe, whatever mess he might get into. That seemed somewhat doubtful to those on the spot, at least on one especial day, every moment of which burnt itself into Hugh's memory. How they waited under a fire that would have shaken, nay, that did shake most men, how some of their own side got unsteady and withdrew, how slowly the sun seemed to creep round as still they waited for leave to move, how at last someone cried, 'Send the Scotchmen at them!', and there followed a stir, a hasty order, and then, with the gallant shout that has pealed

in so many hard-fought battles of 'Scotland for ever!' they were let loose, dashed out across the open, up a sandy bank, and down the other side, where I am bound to admit, their foes did not wait to receive them. Hugh's blood was up, and he thought it would never flow calmly again, as, at last, he turned at the repeated sound of the rally, and found leisure to discover that his left arm was shot through. Soon afterwards, he was despatched home again, somewhat worn and weary, but not likely to be ultimately the worse for his mad expedition. As he drew near the farm where he was overseer, and that he hoped in time to call his own, he caught sight of a figure flitting into the house that was not one of the family. Wondering who might be the guest, he walked on, and into the great kitchen, where, not a soul being visible, he flung himself on a bench and called for his friends, adding as he heard an approaching step, 'Bring me a glass of milk, Mrs. McIntyre, for I'm as thirsty as a fish.' He was surprised that no answer was returned, but was too tired to move, for the day was sultry, and he had walked many miles; so he sat still, looking out at the open door, where the cows

were lying lazily under the scarlet maples, and the bees hummed among the flowers. Over his shoulder a hand somewhat tremblingly held a glass of milk, which he took, but glanced up to see why his old friend was so chary of her welcome. Instead of her wrinkled face he saw one, fair and young, and just now as crimson as the rose in her dress. Hugh sprang up, and put down the milk untasted, while he stared in utter astonishment at the vision before him, like, and yet unlike to one that often haunted his dreams. At last the girl looked up, almost with tears in her eyes, although his speechless surprise brought a smile to her lips. 'Don't you know me, Hugh?' said she.

"'Know you! Why, Mysie Roy, what good fortune brought you here?' exclaimed he, grasping her hands.

"'Well, Hugh, my father sent me, and bid me say that it was the only answer your letter needed.'

"'The best of all, since you were willing to come. Why, Mysie, I thought my life would be such a weary burden when I returned here, that I have almost felt sorry it has been spared to me; but I have found

that waiting for me which has made it the most precious possession a man could have!’

“‘Father gave me another message for you,’ added Mysie, very low, ‘he bid me say, he thought when you had gone fighting in a war that didn’t concern your country, it was time I should come to take care of *you*, instead of our old bargain.’

“‘We’ll take care of each other, dear,’ laughed Hugh, turning to receive the greetings of the household, who had waited, they all thought, long enough before welcoming him back.

“And there ends my tale,” said Hallowe’en, smiling brightly at the guests. “They did take care of each other in good earnest, and when Roy had served his time, he came out to live with them, bringing with him some plants of heather from Strathshian, that flourished in the new soil, and Hugh Maitland’s is but one of many homes where the rich accents of the mountain tongue, the purple blossoms in the garden, and the cherished relics on the wall, such as Angus Macdonald’s uniform, which Mysie had carried with her, bear touching testimony to the strong love of the old country that lingers in the heart of the

Highland emigrant. Nor are old customs allowed to die out, and could you look in there when my day comes round, you might see Roy, now a white-haired but hale old man, teaching Mysie's children how to burn nuts in honour of Hallowe'en."

"Well done, mother, well told!" exclaimed the guests; while Christmas, looking with kindly glance at the old dame, rose up, and glass in hand, begged the company to drink her health; "for," said he, "she has a loving heart, a faithful memory, and a kindly tongue, and three better gifts no one can possess. Our attendant fairies may pour their dew upon her head, but it can only make brighter the light that is already in her eyes."

"I thank you all, my friends," said Hallowe'en, with a soft mist in those same eyes, "but," continued she, deftly putting on her cap again, "as to what Christmas yonder says about my tongue, I consider it's not so polite as might have been expected of him, for, let me tell him, his tongue's but a feckless one compared to my ain."

The relapse into Scotch excited a laugh, as usual, whereupon, Christmas remarked, that it was nearly

time for them to disperse, unless anyone else had anything to say. Midsummer and Mayday both declared they had not; "for," said the latter, "our customs are much the same as yours, mother; we all have our fires, as we said before, and most of your charms were tried in our honour too. To be sure, I have my Maypoles and my Jack-in-the-green, but I do not think anything has come of them worth the telling."

"I," said a melancholy voice, "can contribute nothing either, unless it be the discovery of a piece of music."

"How was that, April; you may tell us that before we go, only do try and speak more cheerfully."

"How can I be cheerful?" asked April, in a yet more dismal tone, and with a shake of his head, that made the silver fishes on his collar rattle again; "would you be cheerful, do you think, if you found the sole end of your existence was to be made a fool? I assure you, the thought weighs upon me so heavily, that I wish I knew how I could make an end of myself."

"And be written down fool with good reason," remarked Swithin.

"True, that thought assists me to bear my fate, since, if I must be a fool, 'tis better to be a living than a dead one. But about this music; a little girl named Lucy Paterson was the means of its discovery; she was a child of a positive turn of mind, and so dreadfully correct in all that she said or did, that people quite longed to find her out in some mistake. This was especially the wish of her cousin Ella Browne, who, though much older, had suffered once or twice from Miss Lucy's criticisms, and was very anxious to punish her for them. It seemed an easy thing to do, for Lucy's one failing was her utter incapacity for seeing a joke, so Ella counted on making her an easy victim. Accordingly, when the first of April came round, Ella went to the school-room where Lucy was reading, and pretended to search anxiously for a piece of music.

"'How tiresome,' she said at last, 'I can't find that song anywhere. Lucy, you're not very busy, couldn't you run to Grey's, the music shop, and get me a copy.'

"'Why can't you go yourself?' asked Lucy.

"'Oh, I have such a lot of things to do this morn-

ing, and it would be such a saving of my time if you would go.'

"'Very well,' said Lucy, 'what is the song you want?'

"'Well, I don't know who it's by, but I want "*The Tune the Old Cow died of*,"' replied Ella, bending over the music to hide the laugh she could not altogether suppress.

"'What an extraordinary name, I never heard the song.'

"'I daresay not, but you know you haven't heard quite everything, Lucy. Now, do go, there's a good girl.'

"Off went Lucy, and, laughing heartily, Ella sat down to wait her return. What was her surprise when she came back with the message, 'Grey hasn't got it, Ella, but he'll order it to-night, and you shall have it as soon as possible.' Saying this, Lucy resumed her book, leaving her cousin quite at a loss to know whether she had penetrated the trick, or whether she was not in fact having a joke in her turn. She said nothing, but felt a little afraid to open a long packet that appeared by next

morning's post. Her aunt, however, enquired its contents, so she was forced to unrol it, and there, with a terrible but appropriate illustration outside, was indeed 'The Tune the Old Cow died of.* I am unable to give the author's name, but I am inclined to think the air deserves the attention of antiquaries."

"Certainly," quoth Michaelmas, "I should imagine that some such strain might have been played during the eating of my immemorial goose."

April only shook his head in reply; his melancholy was so confirmed, that it was rarely indeed he could be got to speak at all.

Christmas now rising, pointed to the East, where a faint band of light began to show itself. "The yule log is burnt out, my friends, the air begins to breathe of morning, and we must bid each other farewell. Join hands then round our table, and let us wish each other, before we go, pleasant memories of the past, bright hopes for the future, and sunny lives, until we hold again our next Christmas Meeting."

* A fact.

UNCLE WILLIE'S FAIRY TALE.

How the sun shines this morning! There is no fear that the sky will cloud over and oblige us to carry umbrellas with us by-and-by, for it is such a real warm, glorious day, that rain is quite out of the question. The gardeners think so too, and at a very early hour began to cut the grass in front of the house, making the children so impatient to get out, that Nurse could hardly dress them. No wonder they are in a hurry, for this is Mamma's birthday, and they are to have a whole holiday, and are to go out and play among the cut grass as soon as the sun has dried it a little: that will be before long, for it is not regular hay, but only short grass on the lawn and slope, and with such a warm sun it will soon be ready for them. There is another treat for them, "more first still," as Isa says, for they are to breakfast in the

dining-room instead of the schoolroom, in honour of the day. Uncle Willie is there, and he insists upon looking after them, and hands them rolls, and jam, and eggs, as if they were quite grown up. Breakfast over, Mamma gives them leave to be off, and away they scamper to put on brown holland pinafores and broad straw hats, in which they may romp about as much as they please. There are three of them ; Mary Margaret, who is still sometimes called by her nursery name of Pussie, but who is a big girl now, reading Roman history, and doing long division sums ; May Isabel, usually called Isa, who has not got beyond English history and the multiplication table ; and George, who is only just beginning lessons, and who goes by the pet names of Pickle and Puck, because he is always getting into mischief. What fun it was out on that grass ! how they pelted each other and tried to smother George, and ran races, and then lay on their backs to try what the house looked like seen upside down ! A very cosy house it appeared, seen any way, and the children decided that it was much better than any other they had ever been in. Then they got up and began to play again, until Mamma,

looking out at the window, saw that they were getting very tired and hot, so she called Nurse, and sent her out with a jug of delicious milk and some nice biscuits. That was something to have upon a birthday—milk and biscuits out of doors—and so Uncle Willie seemed to think, for out he came too. “Uncle Willie!” they shouted, “come here and have some lunch.”

“Coming, young people; I think it would be for your good to share that repast with me, only I’m not going to sit in the sun; oh, you stupid children, why don’t you go under the tree?”

“To be sure,” said Mary, gravely, “you are quite right, we’ll sit down here and you shall tell us a story.”

Now “here” was under a beautiful pink thorn, that threw a nice shade just in front of the house; there the children piled up heaps of grass, and lying down close to Uncle Willie with their milk and biscuits beside them, repeated the request for a story.

“A fairy story, mind, Uncle,” said Isa.

“Pray, Miss, what right have you to suppose that

my head is like a book full of fairy tales, ready to be looked at whenever you choose?"

"Oh, but we know it is, Uncle!"

"Perhaps I've never been in Fairyland."

"Then you had better go there directly, and just tell us what you see upon the way."

"Very well, your small majesty's commands shall be obeyed. Now let me think a minute. Yes—I'm beginning to go—I'm off! This is the way to Fairyland. Nothing but ice! What a lot of it; walls of it, towers, spires, grottoes, floors of it; it is of all manner of delicate colours, pale green and blue, and where the edges catch the sun, it shines even brighter than Mamma's diamonds."

"How nice and cool," sighed Mary.

"Very, but please remember I'm travelling, so you can't expect me to hear your remarks. All this ice country is extremely pretty, and I fancy must be a sort of wall round Fairyland; at least, I don't see anybody moving in it. I think I'll go on a little and look under that great hill of ice on my left; ah, I thought so, this is a cave, the roof is hung with long icicles, every corner glitters and glistens, and in the

and bandages, and all that is wanted here, and when it is done Sister Catharine will come and tell you."

"But he looks so pale, ma'am, and he can't speak," faltered poor Phœbe.

"That is because he is faint, but they will give him something to revive him, and he will soon be better. The fright has made you very pale too, but I think a cup of hot tea will set that to rights. The patients are having their tea now, so I can get you one at once."

She went away to fetch it, and returned in a minute with a nice steaming cup and a piece of bread and butter. Phœbe drank the tea gratefully and felt much refreshed by it, but found some difficulty in eating. However the slice was thin, and she was afraid to vex the kind Sister by leaving it, so by degrees she ate it up, and what with the rest, and the food, and the cheerful way in which Sister Alice talked to her, she soon brightened up, and began to relate the history of the accident, and how it had been for a little child's sake that Johnnie had rushed into peril.

"Was it a creature about two, with little round curls all over its head?" asked the Sister, with eager interest.

"Oh, yes, ma'am, it was a little girl, I think, for I noticed it on the doorstep as we were coming along. I have seen it before sometimes, but always close to its mother till to-day. She is a widow, at least she wears that sort of cap."

child's wonder-land, you will be able to see everything that goes on.'

"'I am afraid I cannot do that ; oh, Spirit ! who can, who can ?'

"The blue eyes change a little, but they look very sad and sweet.

"'No one ; but I can help you to do it for a time, if you are willing ; come here, and let me touch your forehead, and if you wish it in your heart, I will draw from you your memories and thoughts, and send you a child into Fairyland. Your past will lie here for you in my ice cave, a burden or a blessing for you to resume as you go out.'

"'How a burden or a blessing ?'

"'That again depends on yourself ; according to what you see in your travels will your past seem to you on your return.'

"'But you said I should see all.'

"'I said you would have the power of seeing all, but yet you will see only that which you care to see.'"

Uncle Willie stroked the two little heads that nestled up to him, and said, "Will that please you both, shall we go on ?"

"Oh, yes, yes, Uncle," exclaimed the happy voices, "tell us how you felt when the Spirit touched your forehead!"

"I felt as though a cloud had passed away from over the sun, and as though I had grown as light and joyous as the golden orioles that flew before me, and whose flight I followed for want of better guides. On we went, the ice left behind, and now we were among curious rocks of veined and marbled stone; here and there rich mosses clothed them, then ferns peeped out; a trickle of water began to flow from a deep cranny, and tall plants blossomed along its course; next we came suddenly upon a wide beautiful plain, clothed with the most exquisite grass you can imagine, as fine as silk, as green as young corn; here and there tall palm trees tossed their feathery heads, while beautiful creepers climbed about their stems.

"Still wandering on, I came to a broad belt of other trees forming a thick, quiet wood, where the sound of my own footsteps made me start, it was so still. Pushing my way between the bushes, I reached a silvery lake, in the midst of which gleamed an

island, so lovely, that the rest of the land seemed nothing in comparison to it.

“At my feet lay a tiny boat, and longing to see what the island contained, I put my foot on its gunwale before I remembered that it would probably not hold my weight; it hardly yielded, however, to my touch, and thinking that the Spirit of the Ice had, perhaps, made me able to use the fairy vessel, I boldly stepped in, and found, to my delight, that the boat glided easily and swiftly out from the bank, and, as though divining my wish, bore me of itself across to the wonderful island. Landing where a grassy bank sloped to the water, I walked onward, and presently found myself in a garden, such as I had never before even dreamed of. Here there were no seasons, but the flowers of the whole year bloomed together in a world of beauty. Close to me, on the outside of the circle, were the pale blossoms of our spring—primrose with her beseeching face, shy snowdrops, loving violet with her whisper of summer, glad hyacinth, ringing a peal of spring bells I fancied, for my ear caught a faint sound of music. On I walked through the

blossoms, till I came to a central space of turf where at last I was in presence of the Queen and Court of Fairyland. There, in the very centre of the green, was the most exquisite rose tree you can imagine, while to right and left ranked the Princes and Princesses of the court. First came Princess Blanche in a tall white lily, and beside her Prince Fiammo in the lily of Guernsey, then Princess Cerise on a spray of heliotrope, and Prince Fuchsia balancing himself airily on his crimson and purple flower. I must tell you that at first I saw only the blossoms, but that as I stood gazing, a great wonder possessed me that there should be no fairies visible, and remembering what the Spirit had said, I exclaimed aloud, 'Can I see no one in all this beautiful garden?' The words were hardly uttered, when I perceived that every plant had its attendant fay, and some of them were named as I have told you. For a long time I wandered up and down, admiring the delicate forms and breathing the sweet perfumes, when the thought crossed my mind that there must surely be more to see than this. Again I had no sooner imagined the idea than it was answered, and I will try to make

clear to you what followed. From a tall Turk's-head lily beside me rose up a voice, sharp, and out of tune; and this was what the fairy said: 'I am tired of being here! I want to go and see the world. What is the use of wasting one's time in tending one's flower, and looking at one's neighbour?'

"'What!' I exclaimed to a quiet sprite, sitting in the deep blue blossom of a gentian close to me, 'is there discontent even in Fairyland!'

"'Ah,' she replied, 'that is a sad, sad tale; formerly we were quite happy, but one day a wasp down in the witchland lighted on the lip of one Nevercontent, she blew him away with a breath, but the touch had given him the power of carrying discontent upon his wings, and unfortunately the wind, not knowing this, wafted him straight into Fairyland, where he lit on that lily, and since then we have had no peace.'

"'What! because of the wasp?' I asked.

"'He stayed in the lily till the evening, and then a zephyr chanced to pass and heard him murmuring; he was so shocked, that he caught him up directly, and took him right over the boundaries, and I wish

he could have taken Turk's-head too ; but hush, the Queen is going to speak.'

"The Queen was taller than the rest of the fairies, and more beautiful than any, except the Princess Blanche ; she wore a robe that varied in colour as she moved, from pale pink to deep crimson, while on her shoulders hung a mantle of the colour of the pale tea-rose. Her crown was of woven stamens of gold, and her girdle was of pale green moss. Stepping down from her tallest blossom on to a lower branch, she spoke in a clear, delicate voice, that reminded me of an *Æolian* harp ; 'Go, seek the answer to your own questions, oh sad fay, for only by your own searching can it be found. We will appoint another attendant in the meantime for your flower. Return when you have learnt the use of order and beauty.

"Turk's-head, whose name I found was also *Lilius*, was already swaying eagerly on his golden blossom, delighted with the unexpected permission ; but a stately fairy in a dark blue hood bade him remember his duty, and be at least courteous. Dropping on one knee, *Lilius*, somewhat abashed, doffed his yellow cap, and thanked the Queen for her gracious words,

and then bounding up, he flew, or rather floated on the air, towards another part of the garden, whither I determined to follow him, thinking it well to observe in what way he would endeavour to increase the apparent happiness of his sunny life. Seemingly, he did not care to stay among the flowers, whose fairies turned their heads to watch him with surprise as he flitted past, for he hurried along, and at length lighted on a clump of rich green moss, whose brown cups, already full of seed, were tightly closed by their peaked lids. The humble little moss was leaning against one of her stems, and looked up in astonishment at the gay, yellow-garbed fairy, as he dropped down at her side.

“‘You are surprised to see me,’ he said with a jaunty air of independence, ‘but I am free for the present from my work, and am going to have a look at the world. Wouldn’t you like to come too?’

“‘No, indeed,’ smiled Moss, ‘who would look after my pretty brown seed-cups if I were away?’

“‘Oh, dear, me; what does that matter? I never saw anybody so stupid as you are; not you only, but

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all the flower-fairies; one would think you never wished to do anything but attend to your flowers.'

" 'Neither I do; I have quite enough here to keep me busy, and I suspect I enjoy myself much more than you do. You had better go, Lilius, for you will not persuade me to join you, and you are only in my way,' replied Moss, very good-humouredly, but in a tone that did not altogether please her visitor.

"With a toss of his head he rose into the air again, and floated out of the garden to the edge of the silver lake; and I, wishing to follow him, found myself, to my great delight, able to do so. For some time the foolish fellow rambled about in search of a companion for his wanderings, but he met with no better success than at first. Nobody would have anything to say to him, and he began to get quite angry at the contented spirit of his old companions; and turning aside from a wild woodbine to whom he had spoken, sat down on a grassy knoll where he spied the nest of a humble bee.

" 'Bee,' he cried, to one who was returning laden with honey, 'are not you, at least, tired of living here and working all day?' The bee paused, and looked

at Lilius before he replied, and then seeming to recognise him, exclaimed angrily, 'No, and if you worked more and chattered less, it would be better for you! It is you, I suppose, who have been flying about asking ridiculous questions all the day, and putting people out of temper! We heard you, and I really had to stop my work in order to prevent the other bees from stinging you, they were so indignant. Be off with you, now, or I will call them out at once!'

"The Bee buzzed as if he were quite prepared to carry out his threat, and this so alarmed Lilius, that he sprang off the ground, and never stopped till he had crossed the water and lit on the opposite bank. 'It is quite clear,' said he, as if to himself, 'that I need not remain in Fairyland; the question is how to get out of it; I wonder if the Wind would help me!'

"'What is that you say about me?' asked a voice. Looking up, I saw a figure half-sitting, half-reclining on a branch of a tree, and gazing down upon us. It was not an unkindly face, though the features were sharp and the eyes dark and keen; the hair, which was brown and long, streamed out over the branch,

and the dress, which was of blue and grey, was short, so as to leave the feet bare.

“‘Oh, Wind!’ cried Lilius, ‘I want to get out of Fairyland, will you take me?’”

“‘Whew!’ whistled the Wind, ‘I’ve had a good many queer things said to me in my time, but never one so queer as that. ‘Who are you, pray?’”

“‘Turk’s-head Lily; and I don’t see why I shouldn’t want to travel!’”

“‘Don’t you, really! Well, I daresay you’ll find out before you get back again. So you’re the fairy that Nevercontent has bewitched, are you? Poor little mite! it was lucky for you that it was only Zephyr that heard you grumbling, for if it had been my brother South-West, you’d have been carried away with the Wasp and got rid of altogether. I’m South-East,’ added the Wind, introducing himself to me, abruptly, though as I did not know he had observed me at all, I was so startled, I didn’t remember to bow or say, ‘How do you do?’”

“‘I know all about you,’ he went on, ‘and as I am going to carry this little sprite down to the earth, perhaps you had better come too.’”

“So saying, South Wind sprang down, and catching Lilius up with one finger, and me with the other hand, he whirled us through the air, talking all the time. ‘Never travelled like this before, did you?’ he began, ‘lots of people do, though, and most of them rather like it. We’re a large family, we Winds, and some of us are on intimate terms with people down there,’ and he nodded in the direction where I supposed the earth was. ‘My brother, South-West in particular, has a great friend there who wrote a book about him; he’s of a curious temper on the whole, and I fancy you’re fortunate in having met me instead. Here we are, though, so I’ll put you down, and you may see what you can make of your trip, Lilius; only remember, when you want to get back, you had better call for me to take you. Good-bye to you both.’

“‘Good-bye,’ I said, as the Wind blew on, and then I confess I rather wondered what was to happen next; for when I set out to see Fairyland, I didn’t exactly intend to leave it so soon, and besides, I was a little uneasy about the property I had left with the Ice Spirit. Altogether, the prospect was not agree-

able, and I glanced uncomfortably at my small companion, who was sitting on the ground, his hands on his knees, his cap pushed back, and his face full of perplexity. At the sight of his embarrassment I burst out laughing: 'Well, Lilius, what is it your intention to do, now?'

"For a moment he continued to stare at me, and then drawing himself up to his full height, said in a dignified tone, 'I shall reform the world.'

"As I looked down at him, the top of his curly yellow cap scarce reaching the second button of my boot, the marvellous self-confidence of the creature rendered me almost silent with surprise; but, recovering myself, I asked, in as serious a voice as his own, 'Pray, sir, how and where do you mean to begin?'

"'Follow me,' he replied, 'and you will soon know.' With that he folded his arms with a grand air and proceeded onwards, pointing his toes carefully, and carrying his head high, as though the whole world were looking on. I crept after him humbly, very curious to see what fantastic ideas of reform he could have picked up from Nevercontent's ally, the Wasp. Nor had I long to wait, for as we passed a sunny

bank clothed with ferns, whose tender shoots were still folded up carefully from the frost, Lilius waved his hand towards them and cried, 'Oh, foolish ferns, continuing in a cautious and slow custom for mere custom's sake, unfurl your fronds boldly, and feel the pleasant air of spring!'

"Here and there tiny heads of the fern fairies peeped out in amazement, and to those who would listen, Lilius poured forth his ideas. So fluently did he talk of the sweets of independence, that some of his hearers began hurriedly to bend back their soft stems, and rouse the fronds from their light sleep, and on these the speaker smiled approvingly, as he passed on into a copse close at hand.

"Across the road a shadow fell, grey and trembling from a hazel-bush, where, among the thickest of the branches two birds were happily building a nest.

"'Hark ye, Mrs. Finch,' said Lilius, 'are you going to sit on eggs in that nest!'

"'I hope so, of course,' answered Mrs. Finch, letting a twig fall in her astonishment.

"'Ignorant biped!' returned my companion, his

contempt expressed in his uplifted chin, 'what a waste of your life, what a loss of enjoyment!'

"'Bless me, you don't say so!' exclaimed Mrs. Finch, who appeared a little impressionable.

"'I do say so! Were you to cover your eggs over with leaves, or request Mr. Finch to sit upon them in his turn, what a happy life you might lead, and what a lot of worms you might pick up! You would be quite a benefactor to the plants that dislike worms.'

"'To be sure I should; I never really thought of it in that light before!'

"'And you'd better stop thinking of it now! Abominable rubbish!' burst forth Mr. Finch, who had listened open-beaked to the dialogue, and who now darted down in a ruffled condition upon Lilius; indeed, I feared that in his wrath he would altogether swallow up my little guide, so I thrust out my foot, at sight of which Mr. Finch paused, while we seized the opportunity to hurry away, noticing as we went, how merrily a cuckoo close by was calling to us.

"As we continued our walk, we came to a wood full of rabbits, whisking from one of their holes to another, comparing notes on the prospects of the

leaf-harvest, scratching wise ears as they speculated on the turnip crop, and otherwise employing themselves in talk or household cares. Now in spite of the dignity with which Lilius moved, his foot-fall did not appear to disturb them in the least, but the moment my clumsy steps were heard there was a change ; the solemn brown eyes vanished, there was a flashing hither and thither of little white tails, and not a rabbit remained above ground,—or so, at first, I thought. Standing still, however, to observe the place, I spied one furry-back peeping out from among the grass, not so far off but that I could hear the words in which Lilius, moving forward, addressed it.

“‘ Oh, wise rabbit, you have attained to knowledge in your youth, since you alone remain behind when all your kin have fled.’

“ At this compliment, one long ear cocked itself up, and appeared to invite more of the same sort.

“‘ Were I you,’ continued the fairy, ‘ I would aspire to yet greater things.’

“‘ If you please,’ quoth the rabbit, rearing himself up and speaking timidly, ‘ who are you, and what do you mean ?’

“‘I am Lilius, the great improver,’ was the haughty reply; ‘I have made it my task to travel and enlighten the world, and already I have in part succeeded. Why, I ask you, should you and the other inhabitants of the world continue to lead the same monotonous lives as your ignorant forefathers, remaining enslaved by a wearisome routine when new possibilities are before you? Remark, for example, that your friends, by blindly yielding to their customary fears, have lost this opportunity of hearing me, while you have gained it by your superior courage.’

“The rabbit got up upon his tail and thoughtfully rubbed his nose, first with one fore-paw and then with the other. ‘That may be true,’ said he, ‘though I don’t know what Possibilities are, at least, I think not; I only stayed out because I didn’t hear you coming.’

“‘Better and better,’ cried Lilius, enthusiastically. ‘Chance offered you an opportunity, and you seized it; act upon this happy precedent, scorn prudence, it is but the virtue of the weak; go, and boldly inform your relatives that you mean to profit by

your own experiences, and they who are so ignorant will, undoubtedly, make you King of the Conies.'

"'Dear, me, that sounds very fine, I shall certainly do as you say. King of the Conies, indeed!'

"The rabbit stroked his ears, and Lilius, with a bow, exclaimed fervently, 'Happy, happy Bunny!' and prepared to move on; the rabbit attempted to return his salutation, but suddenly remembering something, stopped short in a rather awkward effort, and called after him, 'But, stop sir, stop, and tell me what are Possibilities; have they anything to do with turnips?' Lilius affected not to hear and walked on, but I remarked that the tip of his ear looked a shade more pink than usual.

"'You are getting on pretty well, I think,' said I, 'though at this rate it will take some time to reform the world.'

"'I don't know that, the world is not such a very big place after all.'

"'Oh!' said I, wondering inwardly how much my small guide knew about it, and just then an opportunity offered itself for testing his information, for, emerging from the wood, we perceived in front of us

a wide plain, where towns, villages, and farms seemed to spread in endless succession before our eyes. 'What do you think of this, Lilius?' I asked. He did not reply at first, and when I repeated my question, spoke hesitatingly, 'Friend, you are taller than I, the grass rather impedes my vision, so please to lift me if there is anything to see.' I was surprised at this remark, as I imagined my guide better able to move about than I; but on stooping, so that he could step upon my finger, I discovered for the first time that he had lost his power of floating through space, for he grasped a hair which grew on my knuckle, and seemed terribly afraid of falling. Raising him very gently, I pointed to the immense tract before him, and again enquired how he meant to improve so wide a country; but he, in no way daunted, said he could get to the end of it very soon. Much puzzled, I asked him how, and he replied that we had walked as far already, whereupon, I began to suspect that his sight was scarcely as long as mine, and on questioning him, found that such was indeed the case; he could hardly distinguish anything clearly beyond the next field, and I knew not whether to

laugh or to moralise over this pigmy, whose philosophy was the child of discontent, and whose ignorance was greater even than his conceit. With the self-satisfied calm of perfect folly, he sat on my hand and gazed into the tiny region, which to him was the world, while beyond his narrow range, men toiled, and fresh winds blew, and sunbeams glinted, and the smoke of busy cities clouded the fair sky as far as I could see; and beyond that again lay worlds as strange to me, as mine to him. After all, I was only a pigmy on a larger scale, and as this thought crossed my mind, I seemed to see the face of the Ice Spirit with a kindly smile in his blue eyes, and to understand that he said to me, 'You have learnt your first lesson.' Just then, a peal of childish laughter broke on the still air, and round the corner of the wood came two boys, full of play. Lilius, at the sight, sprang up, forgetful of his lost power, and would have had a terrific fall, but that I caught him in my left hand and steadied him, until he had recovered his breath.

"'How disagreeable,' he panted, 'I never understood before what a limited power you mortals have, who can only walk.'

"Here was my pigmy turning the tables on me, and I felt myself growing yet humbler.

"‘Now,’ he continued, ‘I have found the right opportunity for exercising my influence ; hitherto the poor creatures to whom I have spoken were of narrow intellects, and failed to comprehend their Possibilities ; but here are my true listeners awaiting me.’

"So saying, he advanced towards the children, the youngest of whom shouted with delight as he saw him, ‘Brother,’ cried he, ‘here is a real fairy coming to see us!’

"‘Why, so it is,’ said the elder, regarding Lilius with great curiosity, ‘How do you do, little fairy?’

"‘Well, I thank you,’ replied Lilius, bowing, ‘and charmed to have an opportunity of exchanging with you some ideas on the improvement of the world.’

"‘Oh, Brother,’ whispered the youngest boy, pulling the elder’s jacket, ‘what long words he uses, they’re just like what Mamma reads out of the *Times*.’

"‘Nonsense, Bertie, what do you know about the

Times. I—I don't exactly see what you are coming to, fairy.'

"I wish to release people from the thralldom of custom, and the monotony of order.'

"Oh,' replied Dick, and stood staring blankly.

"I wish, in other words, to reform the world.'

"Papa says, that means trying to do away with everything and upset everybody; I'm sure I don't want to be upset,' remarked Bertie.

"Do be quiet, Bertie! You want to reform the world, eh?'

"I do, for the happiness of its inhabitants.'

"Hooray!' exclaimed Dick, tossing up his cap, 'we'll have no schoolmasters, do no lessons, go exactly where we like, and always eat jam! What a jolly little fellow you are, fairy!'

"And you,' responded Lilius, 'are the answering mind I have so wished to meet! Why, as you say, should you do lessons? let your mind grow! Why have schoolmasters? you can learn for yourself! Why not go where you like? you have sense of your own! Why not eat jam—why not—I say, let life be all jam? Hooray!'

“‘But you forget I came here to reform, and teach you how to improve yourself, and you should be ready to obey and assist me.’

“‘So I am obeying you. Am I not ready to reform myself on your plan! But here’s Bertie, we’ll make him go home and speak to them all.’

“‘I won’t, then,’ said Bertie, ‘you can go yourself.’

“‘But I’ll make you! See, now, you’ve only to go and tell them that we’ve met a wonderful fairy, who says I’m to do no lessons, and eat lots of jam, and who’ll burn the house down if they don’t mind him; won’t you, fairy?’

“Lilius rubbed one ear, much in the same way as the would-be King of the Conies; but, before he could speak, a loud sob from Bertie interrupted the conversation. ‘Oh dear, oh dear,’ he cried, ‘I always thought fairies were such nice, pretty creatures, and so kind, and now I’ve met one, and he’s only made Dick cross. I won’t go and say all that to Mamma, or if I do, I’ll tell her on purpose that she may have you caught and whipped, you nasty cross thing!’ Dick stamped with impatience as he saw the little fellow rubbing his eyes with his pinafore, and sobbing

piteously, then taking him by one arm he shook him, which by no means stopped the tears, Lilius meanwhile, edging away towards my foot, which I thought he regarded as a sort of ladder of escape in case of violence.

“‘That child’s no use when he begins to cry, Mr. Fairy, so you and I must settle matters between us ; now, if you won’t go alone, and I won’t go alone, we’d better perhaps go together ; how will that suit you ?’

“‘Excellently,’ replied Lilius, ‘you shall show me the way.’

“Dick accordingly began to retrace his steps, the fairy following him, and Bertie bringing up the rear slowly and unwillingly, a deep sob still escaping him at intervals. The road after a while descended into a hollow, and skirted a marshy tract, beyond which lay a river. ‘We live over there,’ said Dick, pointing to some woods on the other side of the stream, ‘we have to go a long way round to get to the bridge, and people say this bog is not safe, and that they can’t make a shorter cut ; but I believe that’s nonsense. I know the shepherds cross it sometimes.

By-the-bye, Fairy,' he exclaimed, stopping short, 'I daresay you could dry the place up for us, couldn't you?'

"'N-n-o, I'm afraid not,' said Lilius, 'you see, I didn't undertake to do that sort of thing at all; I don't know much about bogs.'

"Dick eyed him all over contemptuously. 'Fairy, I begin to think you're a humbug! At any rate, you're not the sort of creature Bertie's always reading about, who could do all sorts of clever things. What's the name of your last favourite, Bertie?'

"'Pari-Banou. Did you know her, Fairy?'

"'Can't say I do,' replied Lilius, rather meekly.

"'Dear me, how very ignorant you must be,' remarked Dick, 'however, I'll try you for a while, because I like the idea of jam—apricot's the best, I think—and I know there's a heap of it in the store-room. But about this bog, I've always wanted to cross it, and I've a great mind to try.'

"'Oh, Dick, you know Mamma told us never to go off the road on that side.'

"'But, then, she didn't know that we had a fairy to help us; and, besides, I'm to use my own sense,

Oh what a pang pierced the child's heart at the thought that he had *not* been in time ! She could scarcely answer his questions about her mother's illness, there was such a choking in her throat as of suppressed sobs. It was a new grief that Uncle Dick should be ill, and she was quite as anxious as Uncle Charles could be to get to England on his account, so she made no objection to starting directly after the funeral, though it seemed hard to have to leave the dear grave so soon.

It was a weary weary journey, and little Ethel was *very* tired by the time they reached the large smoky town where Dr. Hastings lived. She could not even rouse herself to look about her as they rattled through the busy streets, and when the cab stopped before a solid red house in a dull-looking square her one wish was that she might be allowed to go to bed without having to face the aunt who was almost a total stranger to her. Of course that could not be, however, and she soon found herself in a large but rather gloomy dining-room, where a substantial tea was spread, and where Mrs. Hastings, a handsome grave-looking person, was waiting to receive and welcome her.

Ethel returned her kiss, and then spite of fatigue looked round with momentary eagerness.

"Is not cousin Eleanor here?" she said.

"Yes, my dear, she is at home, but not well enough to

cluding that little Bertie would get safely home, and being rather anxious as to the fate of his brother, I too left the path, and began to cross the bog. Before we had gone far the soil grew softer, and we sank into the green ooze, but Dick splashed on, laughing and enjoying the sweets of liberty; soon, however, he stumbled and got one or two falls, in which his hands and clothes became of a universal green tint, and his footing growing more and more insecure, he paused at last, and angrily asked his companion why he had led him into such a mess. 'I!' exclaimed Lilius, 'I didn't want you to come, or to come myself. I don't like it at all, and I don't like you.'

"'It's all your fault, though,' retorted Dick, 'but as we are here, I suppose we'd better try to get on.' Another step, a plunge, and the boy was up to his waist in a hole, and what was worse, was beginning to sink. In vain he struggled and screamed with terror, there seemed no prospect of his getting out, and poor Lilius, scarcely less alarmed, exclaimed ruefully, 'Oh, I wish I were back in Fairyland, I'd be quite contented to stop at home.'

Nellie is so longing to see her," and taking Ethel by the hand she led her up into a large day-nursery where in an easy-chair sat the only child of the house, propped up with pillows, but not *looking* much of an invalid, except that her expression was rather worn and fretful.

She was a pretty little girl, with long fair hair and large bright eyes and a delicate complexion, more like a wax-doll than anything her cousin had ever seen. Ethel looked thin and brown and almost plain beside her, though she had a sweetness of look and smile which was worth more than Eleanor's beauty.

This sweetness attracted the little invalid, and though her first greeting was a fretful, "I thought you were *never* coming, it's ages and ages since I heard the cab stop!" when they had exchanged kisses she went on more kindly, "I'm so *glad* you're come, you'll like to play with me, won't you? All my dolls have got on their best dresses because of you."

"Ethel must have some tea, and then she'll come up and see you again," said Mrs. Hastings, "she has had a long journey, and must be very hungry, I'm sure."

"Why can't she have tea up here?" rejoined Nellie, pouting, and an argument ensued, in the midst of which Mrs. Hastings desired the nurse to take Miss Warburton to her room and help her to remove her wraps.

When Ethel returned to the nursery after tea, feeling a

the bridge, I held up my hand and looked at my small companion seriously.

“‘Lilius, we have come a long way this morning, haven't we?’

“‘A very long way, indeed. I am quite tired.’

“‘Do you see that we are no nearer the end of the world you talked about, than we were when we set out?’

“‘Yes, I begin to think it is too big for me.’

“Finding him in this reasonable frame of mind, I endeavoured to make plain to him the magnitude of the work he had proposed for himself, and then suggested that we should go back and see what the result of his first attempts at improvement had been, before making any further efforts in that line.

“Accordingly, we soon came to the wood where the rabbits dwelt, but not one was to be seen; only in the pathway stood two men with guns, looking at a little dead rabbit, whom Lilius recognised as his acquaintance.

“‘What a queer little beast,’ said one of the keepers, ‘it must surely have been a tame one, or it wouldn't have come up to us in that way.’

"Earrings! none of my dolls have that. How did you ever put them in?"

"I didn't, they were in when I bought her,—when Mother bought her, at least,—but she wasn't dressed then."

"Who dressed her?"

"Mother did," replied Ethel, bringing out the words in a trembling tone; "she sat up part of one night to do it, because she wanted it to be a surprise to me on my birthday, and if she had done it in the day I should have seen her."

"But did she never give you more than *one* doll? Why I have got fourteen, counting those in the baby-house."

"I had another old one, but it got broken. I never had many toys, we were always moving about so, and they would have been a trouble to pack and unpack,—besides, I never had much time for play."

"Not time! why what did you do all day?"

"O, there were my lessons, and my work, and then I used to read story books to Mother, and when she was able we went out together, and if not I was sent out with the servant, and sometimes there were English letters to write."

"You never wrote one to me."

"No, I did not know that you would care, but I used to write to Kate and Flo, and sometimes to Uncle Dick. Ain't you sorry that he is so ill?"

"Ye—es, oh, of course I am, but I don't like him much,

him down, but it was no use, and of course he was killed. I myself am inclined to think that he must have partaken of too many early fir-shoots, and that the turpentine affected his head. I cannot otherwise account for his conduct; but I must wish you good morning, as I am much engaged.'

"So saying, the rabbit popped down again into his apartments, and as I picked Lilius up, I asked him what he thought of his work. 'No doubt one makes mistakes occasionally,' said he, pertly, 'rabbits are not intelligent creatures, but I fully expect we shall find Mrs. Finch much the happier for my suggestions.'

"On approaching the bush where that lady lived, we heard a great chattering, for a regular bird parliament was being held, apparently in order to settle a fierce quarrel, which was going on in the very centre of the assembly. We soon saw that the disputants were no other than our two friends; and by listening attentively to the conversation, we made out the cause of the dispute. The senior Finch present, being anxious to arrive at a decision in the case, in order that he might go worm-catching, made

vigorous efforts to induce some sort of order, pecking and hustling the birds nearest him, and sharply desiring them not to speak all at once. Silence being to a certain extent obtained, Bully, the crier, commanded Mr. Finch to step forward and state his complaint. A sad object he appeared, as he hopped on to a prominent twig, his feathers out of order, his head severely pecked, and an expression of mingled anger and distress in his eye. With eager volubility he poured forth his griefs, stating that a catastrophe had happened, which had destroyed his domestic happiness for the whole summer. He and Mrs. Finch had finished their nest as usual, and two eggs had already been safely laid, when Mrs. Finch, recalling some evil advice given her by a person she had one day encountered, suddenly announced her intention of leaving the nest for awhile, and taking a day's pleasure.

"As the plaintiff paused for breath, a chirp of disapproval went round the assembly, and was repeated yet more loudly when Mr. Finch added, that not content with this unusual proceeding, Mrs. Finch had actually expected him to sit in her place. 'You

may imagine,' he continued, 'that I was hardly qualified for the task, and considered that the slight put upon me was especially undeserved, as I am invariably most regular in bringing in supplies during the hatching season. However, I was unwilling that the eggs should suffer, and endeavoured to comply with Mrs. Finch's extraordinary demand. I really did my best, but the results were painful—ahem'—said Mr. Finch, glancing over his shoulder at his own tail, 'the honourable assembly may perceive that I rather damaged my best feather in my efforts to squeeze into the nest. Mrs. Finch, meantime, had disappeared, but finding that I was beginning to suffer severely from cramp in my legs, I determined to go in search of her, and peck her into a proper sense of her duty. Alas, Finches! During my absence, the Cuckoo basely ejected my eggs from the nest and deposited her own, and thus, as I said before, ruined my domestic peace.'

"'That might happen to anyone,' chirped one young Finch.

"'Not in *my* family, I assure you,' remarked our friend, sententiously, 'mine has always been a well-

regulated establishment; but the coming of that Strange Person upset Mrs. Finch's mind entirely, and it is upon him that I desire vengeance.'

"Cries of 'Certainly!' 'Agreed.' 'Where is he?'" rose on all hands, and many of the birds began to make short hurried flights with a view to finding the offender. In one of these, a Finch caught sight of Lilius, who was seated astride a twig, on which he had begged me to place him, that he might the better hear what passed. Instantly the bird began to call to the others, saying that here was a conceited looking creature in yellow, who no doubt might be the Person in question. It seemed likely that the conceit would be thoroughly and finally taken out of Lilius, as the whole assemblage gathered round him, our Mr. Finch leading them on. The next few minutes gave the little fairy a vigorous lesson on the folly of meddling in other people's affairs; deafened with questions, accusations, and rebukes, pecked at till his yellow dress was torn to tatters, jostled so that he could scarcely hold on to the tree, it was no wonder that he speedily called in a frightened voice for help, begging his friend the Wind to come to his

assistance, and carry him back to his garden home. Presently, the Wind answered his call, hurrying along the sky with a brown hawk on his wrist, that swooping down from above us, scattered the Finches in terror to their nests.

“‘You seem to have had about enough of this, I think,’ observed South-East, looking at the miserable little object before him.

“‘Oh, yes, indeed, dear Wind; please take me away,’ cried Lilius, earnestly.

“‘Not till you have seen the last of your work,’ replied the Wind; ‘you have forgotten the ferns that you tried to instruct; come and take a look at them.’

“Lifting Lilius from the branch, he carried him and me as before through the wood, till we reached the bank where the ferns had been, and a pitiable spectacle it presented.

“Those fairies who had declined to listen to the arguments of the reformer, now had their fronds in the full glory of their spring dress; indeed, so much had they grown, that I began to think that Lilius and I had been wandering about for a far longer time than I had imagined, an idea that was confirmed

when I remembered the manner in which the old rabbit and Mr. Finch had spoken.

“Those of the fairies, on the other hand, who had followed his evil advice, were clad in withered brown robes, and were weeping bitterly at the consequences of their imprudence; the frost had killed their young fronds, and now, instead of enjoying with their sisters the happy summer sunlight, they were compelled to pass their days in lamenting their lost glory, and so await the time when they, with the rest of the woodland fays, would have to attend upon the Queen, and give an account of the manner in which they had done their work. Piteously did they weep at the sight of Lilius when the Wind set him down among them, and though they were too sorrowful to reproach him, their dark robes and sad faces told their own tale. Quite humbled and dispirited, Lilius turned away with tears in his eyes, and once more begged South-East to carry him back to Fairyland. ‘I have done nothing but harm,’ cried he, ‘and I am very sorry I ever left my own flower.’

“‘Then you are at last wise enough to be fit for your work,’ returned South-East, ‘will you be satis-

fied now to tend your lily without trying to teach your neighbours?'

"'Indeed, indeed I will, I never shall wish to leave it again.'

"'Very well, then we may begin our return journey,' and for the third time South-East carried us away, and speedily deposited us at the edge of the Queen's garden. How quiet and beautiful it looked, and how calm and happy seemed the faces of the fairies as we passed among them, to crave an audience of the Queen! Very kindly did she greet the returned wanderer, who knelt at her feet, and at her command related his adventures, bravely confessing his own 'blunders. When he had finished, the Queen again addressed him in her silvery tones: 'You think then, Lilius, that it is better to be obedient to our rule than to misrule yourself, and wiser to do your own share of work than to tempt others to idleness.'

"'Yes, indeed, your Majesty,' said the penitent Lilius.

"'That is well; then we will command a fresh robe to be given you, and allow you to return to your lily, only, as a further punishment for your folly, we

shall remove your blossom from its present ground, and place you on the outskirts of the garden, where it shall be your especial task to see that no dangerous intruder, such as the Wasp who led you astray, shall ever obtain entrance into our peaceful kingdom.'

"Lilius kissed the Queen's rosy hand, and withdrew with the court attendants to receive his new robe, and be shown the place of his future abode. I followed for a moment to bid him farewell, and then, with a humble obeisance to the Queen, took my departure also from the garden. Crossing the lake, I again made my way through the forest, and over the plain, till I reached the entrance of the Ice Cave. The Spirit looked up as I approached, and smilingly asked me if I had come to resume my Burden.

"'Yes,' I replied, 'but I should like to know one thing before I take it up again.'

"'What is that?' enquired the Spirit.

"'Since you by your touch could relieve me of so great a load, could you not also keep back a part when you return it to me?'

“‘Of deeds once done, I can keep back nothing; of the thoughts and wishes that shape the deeds that are yet to do, I can keep back what you will?’

“‘Ah, that is just as I hoped it would be,’ said I, seating myself before the cave, and looking curiously at the shadowy bundle I now observed lying at the feet of the Spirit. ‘Let me think; there must be much there that I would rather be without. A little discontent for instance, Spirit, is there not?’

“‘A little, I think,’ said the Spirit, smiling again; ‘do you wish that removed?’

“‘Yes, truly, for I have learnt that content is the largest half of happiness, and discontent the dullest cloud with which we shadow our sky.’

“The Spirit bowed his head as if to show that he agreed with me, and passing his hand above the shadow at his feet, seemed to draw out some of it and cast it into the dimness of the cave behind him.

“‘Impatience, too, of that I am sure there is a good deal, and I know now that to rebel against

that which is, is to destroy peace and court misfortune.'

"Again the Spirit withdrew a shadowy something from before him, and I noticed that the expression of his face was becoming more and more tender and hopeful. After a moment's thought I went on; 'Pride, too, is there, and conceit, and they must be banished altogether. Pride is the crown of ignorance, and conceit the garb of folly, for he who knows anything at all, knows how small a place he holds in the great world.'

"'Is there anything else you would leave behind?'" asked the Spirit, as I paused.

"I fancied from his tone there must be more that I had better get rid of, so I thought for a little before I answered him.

"'Obstinacy, Spirit, which comes from pride; take that away, for with it men carve stumbling-blocks to lie in their own paths. Is there yet more I wonder! Yes, one more burden needs removing, and then I think I may take back my property. Clear away laziness, please, Spirit;'" and as I said this, I could not help laughing at the remembrance of the trouble

that tiresome shadow had given me. The Spirit answered me with a smile, that made his blue eyes quite merry, and then laying a quiet hand on my forehead, said gravely, 'You have learnt something by your journey to Fairyland, and will profit by it; take back your Past and return home, leaving here among my ice-bound caves the shadows that marred your peace, and destroyed the beauty of your deeds.'

"As he spoke I fell into a deep sleep, and must have been conveyed by the Spirit's care, or perhaps by South-East, beyond the fairy regions; for when I woke, I found myself sitting under a pink thorn, with my small nephew sound asleep on a heap of grass, and my two nieces looking so very serious, that I am not at all sure that they approve of my visit to fairyland."

"Oh yes, Uncle! Of course we do, Uncle," exclaimed the children, as the tale came to an end, and they scrambled up to hug the narrator.

"I wish we had the Ice Spirit here," said Mary, "for if he would cure me of laziness, I should get my lessons done ever so much sooner."

"And nurse said I was a conceited little puss; he might cure me of that," added Isa, very solemnly.

"But my dear little people," said Uncle Willie, "I am afraid you have forgotten one bit of my story; the Ice Spirit could not help anybody unless they wished it; now, if you two would wish in good earnest, I think you might get rid of your own little burdens for yourselves."

"Do you really, Uncle? I do feel so dreadfully lazy when I want to go out, and have to learn dates instead!"

"I daresay you do; so do I when I want to fish and have to go to my work instead."

"And what do you do, Uncle, to cure it?"

"Give myself a good shake."

"Oh, Uncle, what nonsense; how can you!"

"I assure you I do, Isa; I say to myself, this won't do, and then my wise self gives my lazy self a good shake, and I go off to my work as quickly as I can."

"I think I'll try that next time I feel lazy," remarked Mary.

"Do so, dear, and let me know if it doesn't suc-

ceed very well. Now I must go in, and it is time you were getting ready for dinner, so wake that sleepy boy, and come away. I think if you will try my plan at lessons to-morrow, Mamma will say that you have been the better of listening to Uncle Willie's Fairy Tale."

THE END.

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